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MEN-AT-ARMS SERIES

89

BYZANTINE ARMIES 886-1118

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Introduction

For the era in which they lived the Byzantines had a remarkably sophisticated approach to politics and military strategy. Unlike most of their contemporaries, they learnt very early in their history that winning a battle did not necessarily win a war, and they frequently bought off their enemies with treaties and bribes rather than squander men and *matériel* in potentially fruitless campaigns. Although, even as early as the 6th century, the historian Procopius had shrewdly observed that the payment of tribute to one type of enemy encouraged the aggression of another, still the overall success of this policy is well-testified by the Empire's survival, despite its limited manpower and frequent internal dissension, right up to 1453. Besides, since another aspect of Byzantine diplomacy was the playing off of one enemy against another, the attraction of additional foes was only rarely a problem which gold and honours, falsified letters or sponsored revolts could not solve, and the Emperor's first-class intelligence service, the Office of Barbarians, kept him well abreast of current moods and trends at all times.

Alas, the Empire's contemporaries did not always understand the complex motives of plot and counter-plot, flattery and threat, which were essential ingredients of Byzantine politics, and most tended to regard the diplomatic manoeuvres and skullduggery of the Emperor and his ambassadors as underhand and two-faced (which it was) without appreciating its true politico-military value. The 'bad press' that Byzantium has received from historians and chroniclers over the last thousand years has done little to enhance its reputation, to the point where even today tortuous and underhand behaviour is sometimes described as 'Byzantine'.

But against this backdrop of deceit and intrigue

there is one essential fact that must not be forgotten; that such a policy of threat and bribery inevitably presupposed a strong military establishment. The Byzantine army of the 10th and early 11th centuries, at the height of its power and efficiency, was the best-organized, best-trained, best-equipped and highest-paid in the known world.



Byzantine warriors of the late 10th century. Unfortunately the artistic style utilized betrays signs of a strong classical influence and some inaccuracies have thereby been introduced. The old-fashioned greaves, for instance, are highly improbable at this date. The lamellar corselet, or *klibanion*, of the right-hand figure is accurate enough however, though the muscled leather corselet of his companion is of a type that had probably been obsolete for many hundreds of years. Both corselets have thick leather strips called *pteruges* ('feathers') hanging from waist and shoulder. The cloaks indicate that these are probably horsemen.

Organization

Although the Byzantines clung tenaciously to their Roman heritage in a great many respects (they even continued to call themselves *Rhomaioi* or Romans) army organization was not one of them, and as early as the late 6th or early 7th century, when the Emperor Maurice's military manual, the *Strategicon*, appeared, hardly a vestige remained of the old Roman military system. The organization which Maurice's work outlined remained practically unchanged until at least the late 10th century and probably up until about a century later than that, and it is repeated almost verbatim in another military manual, the famous *Tactica*, written at the beginning of the 10th century (c. 903) by Emperor Leo VI the Wise.

The basic unit for both cavalry and infantry in Leo's day was the *bandon*, alternatively called in the earlier *Strategicon* a *tagma* or *arithmos* (the latter a straight translation into Greek of the Latin *numerus*). The term *bandon* itself was derived from the German word for a banner, and bears witness to the foreign influence prevalent in the army at the time that this particular type of unit evolved in the 6th century. Infantry *banda* consisted of sixteen *lochaghiai*, each of sixteen men commanded by an officer called a *lochaghos* or 'file leader'; he was assisted by a *dekarchos*, 'leader of ten', a *pentarchos*, 'leader of five', a *tetrarchos*, 'leader of four', and an *ouraghos*, 'file closer'. Each four *lochaghiai* constituted an *allaghion* or 'winglet'; these were usually paired off. In heavy infantry units three-quarters of the men were spearmen called *skutatoï* and one-quarter were archers, the archers presumably organized as a separate *lochaghia* within each *allaghion* or as a separate *allaghion*. Light infantry and guardsmen would not have had the split between spearmen and archers, consisting instead of only one troop-type; it has even been suggested that light infantry *lochaghiai* might have comprised only eight men rather than sixteen.

At the time when the *Strategicon* was written cavalry *banda* had been subdivided into three *hekatontarchia*, each commanded by a *hekatontarchos* of whom the senior acted as second-in-command and was called an *illarches*, the *bandon* commander—in both infantry and cavalry units—

being called a *komes* or count. By Leo VI's day, however, the *hekatontarchion* had disappeared and the *bandon* was divided instead into six *allaghia* (probably commanded by officers called *pentekontarchai*). These were generally paired off as in the infantry *bandon* and each pair was still commanded by a *hekatontarchos* (or *kentarchos*). Each of the six *allaghia* had fifty men, organized in five *dekarchiai* of ten men each, comprising *dekarchos*, *pentarchos*, *tetrarchos*, *ouraghos* and six men. On the battlefield the cavalry *dekarchia* usually formed up in two files five-deep with the *dekarchos* and *pentarchos* in the front rank, followed by a rank of lancers, then two ranks of archers, and finally the *tetrarchos* and *ouraghos* closing the files; all four officers were lancers.

Basically, then, by the beginning of the 10th century the standard infantry unit consisted of 256 men (sixteen times sixteen) and the standard cavalry unit of 300 (six times fifty), but the manuals advise us that unit strength could in fact vary between 200 and 400. Those in excess of official strength were apparently not usually taken into action and probably accounted for wounded and sick men and horses and raw recruits. It seems more probable anyway that units generally took the field under-, rather than over-, strength. Standard-bearers, musicians, and officers above the rank of *lochaghos* and *dekarchos* do not appear to be included in these figures.

One of Emperor Nikephoros II's works (ruled 963–969) indicates that by the second half of the 10th century the cavalry *bandon* could in fact be only fifty strong, but this is quite probably a slip of the pen and it seems more likely that the *allaghion* is meant. However, it is not impossible that the term *bandon* might have changed its meaning in the sixty-odd years since Leo had written. One or two sources also imply that by the late 10th century the smallest infantry unit may have been ten rather than sixteen men (with an archer: spearmen ratio of 3:7), though Michael Psellus' *Chronographia*, written in the last quarter of the 11th century, still refers to sixteen-man *lochaghiai*.

At a higher level cavalry (and presumably infantry) organization was in *moirai* (commanded by *moirarchai*) or *dhoungoi* (commanded by *dhoungarii* or *dhoungarokometes*) and *turmai* or *merai* (commanded by *turmarchai* and *merarchai* respectively).



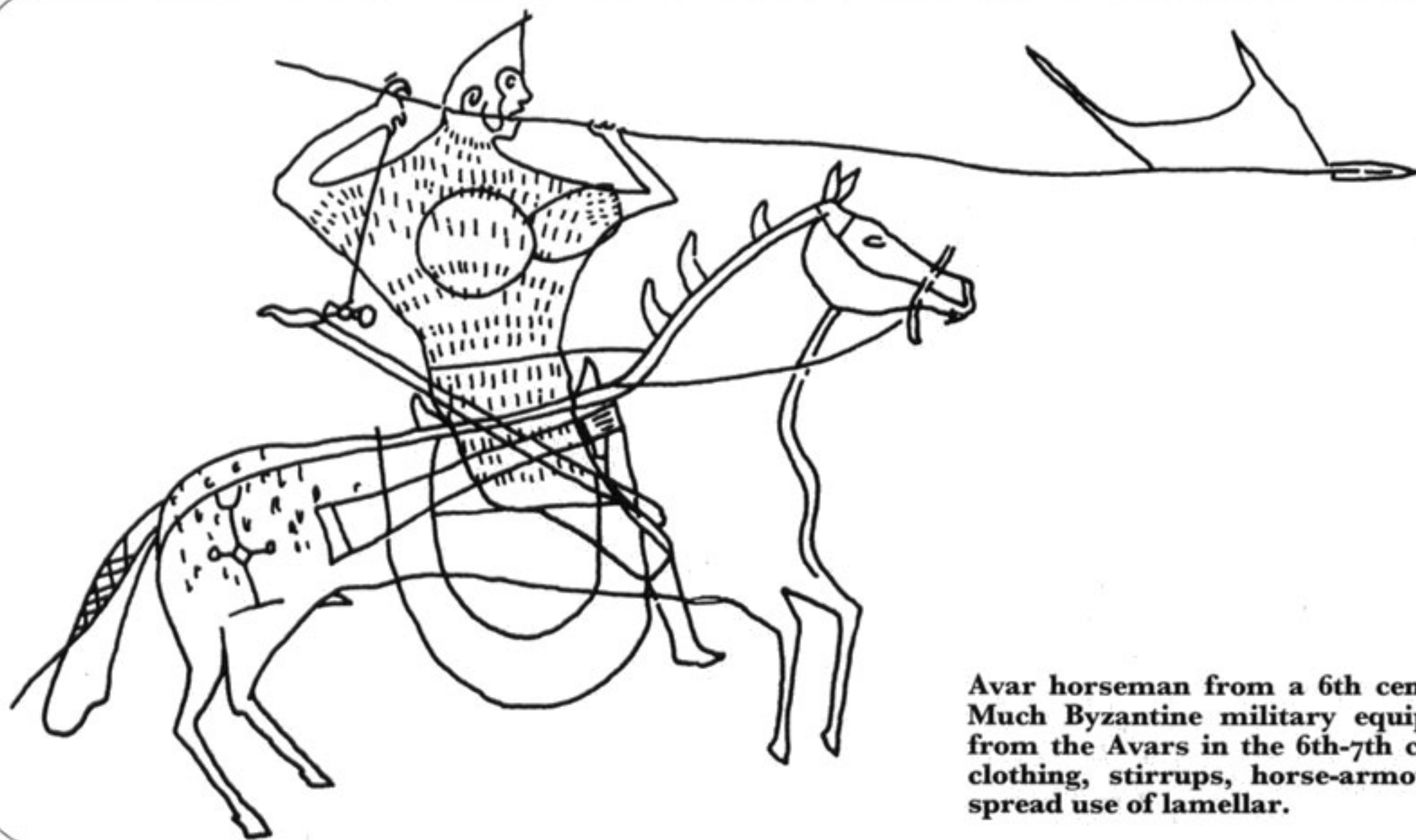
The moira or dhoungos appears to have consisted of an apparently variable number of banda, probably on average between two and five, while the turma or meros (the latter term somewhat archaic by the 10th century) seems to have consisted of three moirai. The earlier *Strategicon* records the moira as comprising 2,000–3,000 men and the meros as 6,000–7,000, but by Leo VI's time we must assume that the strength of these larger units had declined considerably since even the biggest theme (a provincial army corps—see later section) could raise only 15,000 horsemen, and the smallest only 4,000! Certainly in 838 turmai of 'not more than 2,000 men' are reported.

Pay
Byzantine soldiers appear to have been generally well paid. The sources indicate that thematic (provincial) troops received one or one and a half *nomismata* (gold coins weighing 1/72 of a pound) per month, therefore twelve to eighteen *nomismata*, or 1/6–1/4 of a pound of gold, per annum. In addition thematic soldiers also had grants of land, which c. 947 Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus decreed must be worth at least two pounds of gold (144 *nomismata*) for Imperial seamen (and, possibly, infantrymen) and four pounds (288 *nomismata*) for

Spirited cavalry engagement from the Joshua Roll, dating to the first half of the 10th century. The men wear hip-length corselets with pteruges at shoulder and waist, plus iron helmet and leather harness of breast-band and shoulder-pieces. Note also their large shields and kontaria. The officer figure at left sports an impressive helmet crest. (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome)

thematic seamen and cavalymen, this rising to twelve pounds for cavalymen by the end of the 10th century. According to one source an additional *nomisma* was paid for each year of thematic service up to twelve years. However, a 9th century Arab writer recorded that thematic troops were paid only once every three years, or in some cases every four, five or even six years; Constantine Porphyrogenitus says that thematic troops were divided into four groups each paid once every four years, but he explains that this was 'the old practice', without enlightening us as to what the normal practice was in his own day. This seems to mean that thematic troops served for a full year on a rota basis once every three to six years, so that a small core of regular troops was available at all times. Alternatively it may indicate a supplementary payment made at periodic training or inspection musters.

In addition, soldiers received rations during active service, and occasional special bounties and



Avar horseman from a 6th century rock carving. Much Byzantine military equipment was copied from the Avars in the 6th-7th centuries, including clothing, stirrups, horse-armour, and the widespread use of lamellar.

a share of the spoils taken on campaign, while disabled men received a pension, and widows of men killed in action sometimes received compensation in the form of a lump sum (five pounds of gold in the 9th century).

Rates of pay for officers in Leo VI's reign were as follows: dekararches received one pound of gold per annum (72 nomismata); pentekontarchai (commanders of fifty) two pounds; *kometes* (bandon commanders) three pounds; fifth-class *strategoi* or 'generals', five pounds; fourth-class *strategoi* (the naval commanders of the Kibyrrhaiots, Samos and Aegean Pelaghos Themes), ten pounds; third-class *strategoi*, twenty pounds; second-class *strategoi*, thirty pounds; and first-class *strategoi*, forty pounds (2,880 nomismata). Salaries of hekaton-tarches, moirarchai and turmarchai are not recorded, those of the latter probably varying depending on what grade of general they served under. These salaries only apply to the Eastern Themes anyway, and officers of the Western Themes probably received lower pay, drawn from provincial taxes rather than coming directly from the Imperial Treasury.

EQUIPMENT

Whether in reality such complete equipment as is outlined below and in the colour plate captions actually appeared very often (if at all) seems

dubious; certainly the pictorial sources do not encourage us to believe so. But there is little doubt that the quality of such equipment as was issued was of a very high standard, and it is worth quoting the shrewd observations of Catacolon Cecaumenus, holder of various military posts in the Eastern Themes, from his own *Strategicon* of c. 1070: 'Above all,' he writes, 'insist that your horsemen have good mounts, and complete and well-kept equipment, and saddle-girths and boots that fit. For you can be sure that a horseman with a good horse, a smart uniform and good quality weapons will, if he's brave, become doubly so, or—if timid—will take courage and do his bit. But if he is badly equipped, with too big a saddle, boots that don't fit, and a good-for-nothing horse, then you can be just as sure that however brave he may be the only thing he will be thinking of is how to save his own skin, by taking flight at the first opportunity.'

Armour

We are amply provided with detailed information on arms and armour of this period by the various surviving military manuals and documents and large numbers of contemporary illustrations. From these it is clear that the three main forms of armour in use were mail, scale and lamellar, with lamellar predominating.

Lamellar armour comprised small, basically rectangular plates (either long and narrow or very

nearly square) laced together in rows by threading leather thongs through punched holes, the rows then being laced to each other overlapping upwards (unlike scale armour, which overlaps downwards). The lamellae were most commonly iron, but leather and horn also feature prominently in the sources. The resulting corselet, characteristic of Byzantine military equipment, was called a *klibanion* (a name derived from the Latin *clibanarius*, a heavily-equipped cavalryman), usually sleeveless or short-sleeved and reaching only to the waist. Some knee-length lamellar corselets with long sleeves are to be found even in 11th century manuscripts, but these were rare.

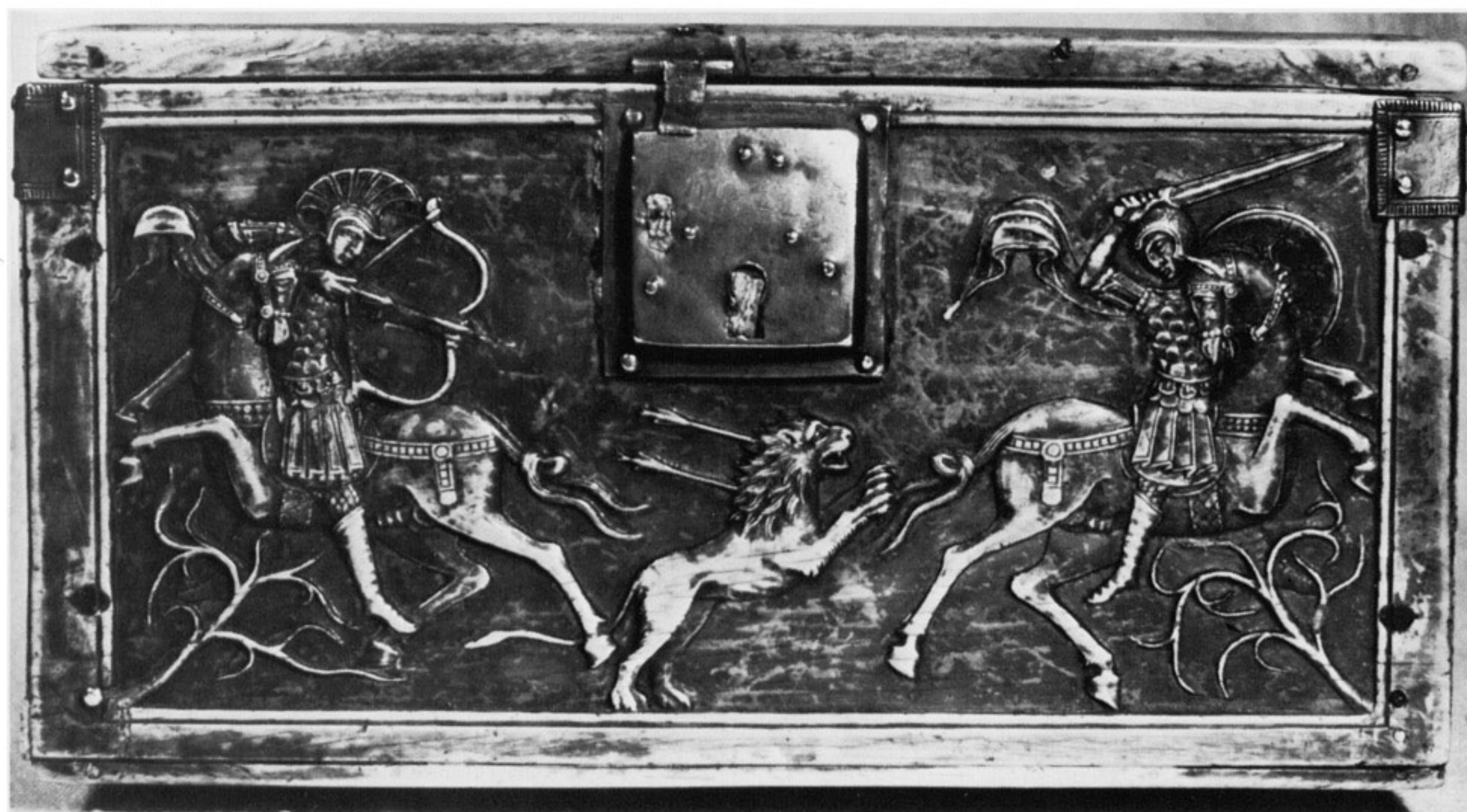
Being stiff and somewhat inflexible, scale corselets, where they occur in the illustrative sources (and they are not always easy to distinguish from mail owing to the artistic techniques utilized), tend to cover only the torso and are invariably sleeveless. Mail corselets (called *zabai* or *lorikia*, cf. Latin *lorica*) are rarest of all; they are usually depicted knee-length and frequently have sleeves reaching to elbow or wrist. Mail hoods were also worn. Klibania are often shown being worn over mail corselets.

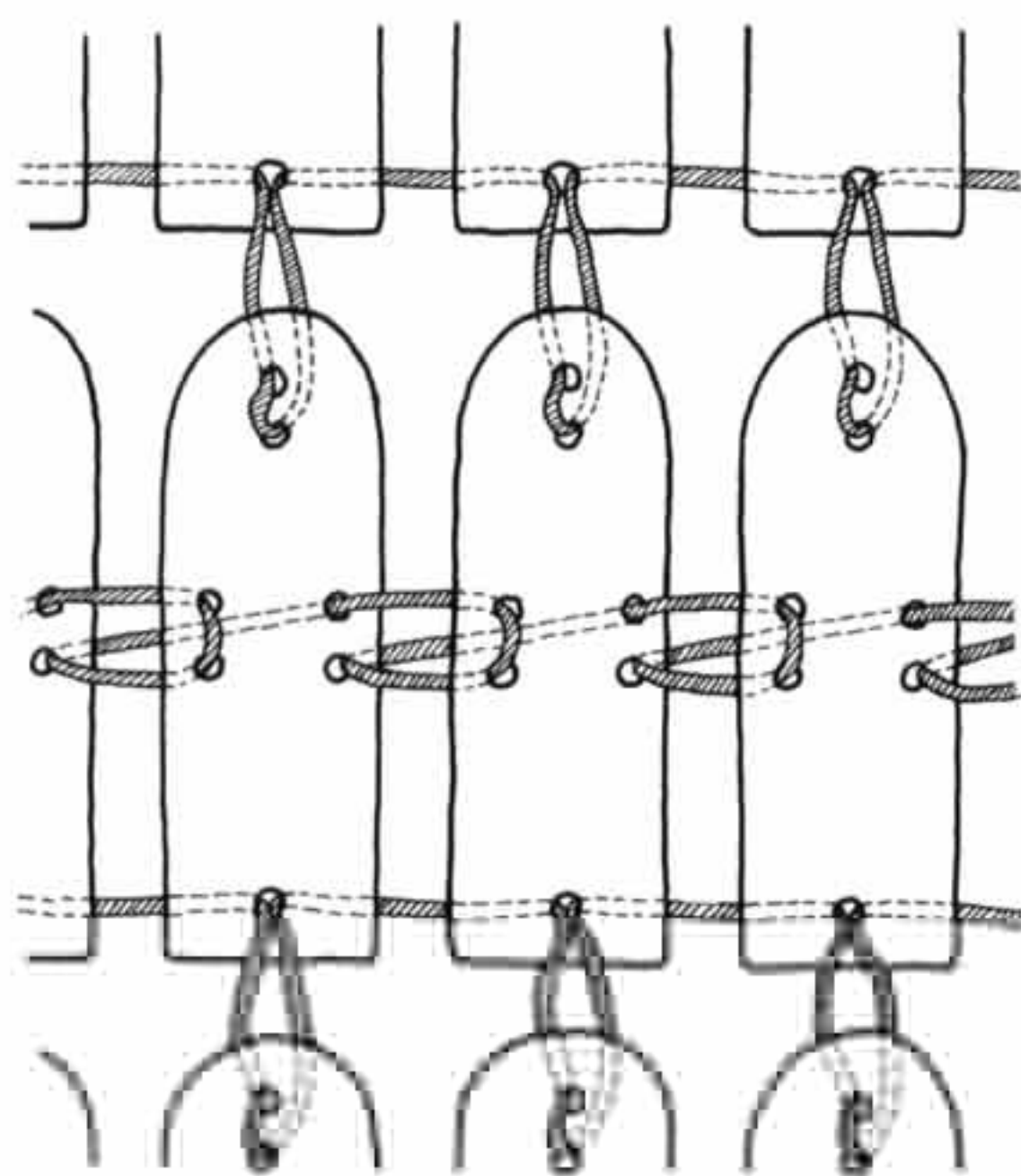
Padded and quilted cotton, leather, wool and felt body-armour, a minimum of $\frac{3}{4}$ in thick, was also in use under various names, such as *epilorikion*,

kabadion and *bambakion*. All were sleeved, and the *epilorikion* and *bambakion* at least also had hoods. The former was worn over, and the latter under, the *klibanion* or *lorikion*. *Epilorikia* were usually worn by cavalymen, *kabadia* by infantrymen. An arrowproof felt cloak is also mentioned in the *Tactica*, as is a thick felt cap.

In place of sleeves, and owing to the fact that they are usually only hip-length, most scale and lamellar corselets (and many mail and quilted corselets too) had hanging strips called *pteruges* at waist and shoulder, either of leather, quilted cotton or even splint-armour. (Helmet aventails were similarly often of lamellar, leather or cotton lappets, though others had mail aventails leaving only the eyes uncovered.) Forearms and lower legs were protected by vambraces (*cheiropsella* or *manikelia*) and greaves (*podopsella* or *chalkotouba*) respectively, generally of splint construction. These were usually iron, but leather, wood and felt were also sometimes used. In addition the tall, square-toed boots, which were a standard part of Byzantine equipment, also had a defensive value, being

Two fully-equipped horsemen on a lion hunt, probably in Anatolia or northern Syria, taken from an ivory casket in Troyes Cathedral dating from the 11th century. The corselets are presumably lamellar, though the large upward-pointing scales are somewhat unusual. Absence of stirrups here must be artistic licence since they occur in another panel on the same casket. (Trésor de la Cathédrale, Troyes)





Reconstruction of lamellar lacing, before being drawn tight; rows overlap upwards and, in this instance, to the left. Since the shape of the lamellae and the number of punched holes could vary enormously so too could the style of lacing. [After Bengt Thordeman]

'doubled' or padded. Hands were sometimes protected by leather gauntlets, reinforced with mail in the case of extra-heavy cavalry.

Helmets appear to have been largely of a single, universal pattern which can be clearly seen in many contemporary pictures. It was of iron, normally with a separate neckguard.

Shields

Shields came in a variety of shapes and sizes. The heavy infantry shield, the *stata*, was most commonly a three by four-foot oval though some carried a circular shield of 30in diameter which Leo describes as a *thronos*. Some cavalry carried circular shields of a similar size. Light infantry, however, carried only a very small, round shield of 12in diameter, as—according to the manuals—did many heavy cavalry (particularly archers, who because of their bows were unable to use anything larger; officially they should not have carried a shield at all in Leo's time). By the time the *Sylogē Taktikon* was written c. 975, 'three-cornered' shields, quite clearly early kite-shields, were also in use amongst both infantry and cavalry. That of the

infantry was about 54in deep, that of the cavalry somewhat smaller, apparently 36–40in (which, interestingly, tallies with a 40½in shield recorded at the beginning of the century by Leo). Byzantine manuscripts first begin to depict such kite-shields in the mid-10th century, where they seem to be about two feet broad at their widest point. Later versions taper considerably more, in keeping with those in use in the West (which themselves probably evolved from the earlier Byzantine type). Judging from illustrative sources the kite became the predominant shield-type amongst both infantry and cavalry during the course of the 11th century.

Weapons

The Byzantine soldier's main arms consisted of lance and sword. The former was the *kontos* or *kontarion*, adopted centuries earlier from the Sarmatians and Alans, twelve feet long for cavalrymen and the same or somewhat longer for infantry. Other types of spear and javelin were the *rhiptarion* or *akontion* (an eight- to nine-foot light throwing spear), the *serufis* (cf. Latin *serutium*) and the *menafis* (Latin *menafium*). The last type occurs only in the *Sylogē Taktikon* and the *Nikephori Procepta Militaria* of Nikephoros II Phokas, as a heavy javelin used by a proportion of men (called *menafistai*) in each heavy infantry unit. The Roman *martisbarbulus* is also recorded as still being in use, now under the name *marzobarbulos*; apparently by the 10th century only heavy cavalry used these short, lead-weighted darts, which were carried in a case at the saddle.

The sword was called a *spathion* (cf. Latin *spatha*) and measured 36in including or excluding the hilt. Its scabbard was most often suspended from a baldric and hung at the left hip. The other main type of sword was the *paramision*, which first appears in the late 9th century. It was apparently a one-edged weapon of the same length as the *spathion* and was quite possibly a type of sabre; unlike the *spathion* it was girded at the waist.

Though Byzantine artists do not seem to have normally considered soldiers as suitable subjects they nevertheless drew, carved and painted endless numbers of military saints. This is one of them, St Demetrius, from an 11th-century ikon. He carries a large circular shield and wears quilted body-armour, probably an *epitaphion*. Note also his horse's tied tail. A helmet would normally be worn, but saints are usually bareheaded in Byzantine art.

Other secondary weapons included axe and mace. Except for the *tzikourion* (the old Roman *securis*), a common infantry side-arm, axes were uncommon amongst native Byzantine soldiers, though they were the principal weapon of Varangian guardsmen. The mace (*matzoukion* or *bardoukion*, the latter meaning 'sledgehammer') was used mainly by cavalrymen, though the *Praecepta* lists it amongst infantry equipment. Horsemen kept it in a leather case attached to the saddle.

Missile weapons consisted chiefly of bow and sling. The Byzantine bow was a composite weapon 45 to 48in long with short, powerful limbs, probably originally adopted from the Huns. It was used by both cavalry and infantry, though its use among the former was on the decline during this era, the majority of Byzantine horse-archers being provided by Asiatic mercenaries. In fact archery in general had been on a steady decline in Byzantine armies since the 8th century, so much so that in his *Tactica* Leo VI had cause to complain that 'archery has wholly been neglected and has fallen into disuse amongst the Romans'. He proposed the reintroduction of enforced archery practice (even for men exempt from military service) and ordered his strategoi to ensure that every household possessed a bow and forty arrows, but apparently to little effect.

The reorganization of heavy cavalry units so that two men out of every five were archers and no longer carried lances at all was probably one of Leo's reforms too, aimed at ensuring that bows were kept out of the hands of those incapable of putting them to good use (though he was basically following the earlier *Strategicon*, where Maurice recommended of *kataphractoi* that though double-armed the best archers should fight mainly with the bow and the best lancers with the *kontos*). The fact that many archers were also issued with a sling (*spendone*) may be further indication of Byzantine inefficiency with the bow. *Spendobolon* was another term sometimes used to describe the sling, though this was technically the name used for the four to four-and-a-half-foot staff-sling. Bow, sling and staff-sling, together with javelins and a bolt-throwing weapon called a *solenarion*, were all used mainly by light infantry.

The *solenarion* occurs in several sources and appears to have been a type of crossbow; it is

usually mentioned in conjunction with a quiver and short arrows called *menai*. The *Sylloge Tacticorum* describes the *solenarion* as very effective in battle because its arrows were fired at such velocity that no armour was adequate against them and the naked eye was unable to see them, in addition to which they could fire to a very great range. Like Vegetius' *arcuballista* seven centuries earlier, the *Sylloge* adds that the *solenarion* was a weapon used by light troops. For reasons unknown it seems to have dropped out of use around the middle of the 10th century or soon after, to be reintroduced either at the end of the 11th century or the beginning of the 12th through contact with the Normans.

One final weapon which needs to be mentioned is the *rhomphaia*, with which many Byzantine guardsmen were apparently armed. It is not altogether clear exactly what this was and there has been prolonged but inconclusive debate as to its identity. It was clearly of a distinctive shape, but the military manuals, thorough though they are, do not even mention it, let alone offer any kind of description. The most convincing theory, however, and the only one which seems to fit the little written and archaeological evidence that is available, is that it was a *falx*-like weapon with a slightly curved blade of about the same length as its handle.

The Tagmata

The nucleus of the Byzantine army during this era was provided by the regular guard units based in Constantinople. Of these the Scholae, Excubiti, Arithmos and Ikanatoi cavalry regiments collectively comprised the Tagmata, though in a looser sense this term was also sometimes used to include the Numeri, Hetaereia and other units stationed in the capital, and could even include the Imperial Fleet (or at least those elements of it that were seconded to the Emperor's personal service).

Of the four principal regiments the Scholae was the most senior and probably the oldest; seven *scholae* are recorded in the early 5th century *Notitia Dignitatum*, and Procopius tells us that the *scholae* of his day totalled 3,500 men. By the 9th century their numbers may have risen to 4,000—such at least is the information which Kodama, a 10th century Arab author, gleaned from an earlier work by al-



Another engagement between kontarion-armed cavalry, this time from the heavily illustrated manuscript of Scylitzes, now in Madrid. The illuminations probably post-date this era but appear to have been largely based on 11th-century originals. Points to note here are the quivers of the two bodies in the foreground, and the bandon-type standards with their long, streamer-like tails. Armour is mainly scale (or mail?). (Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid)

Depicting Basil II's victory over the Abasgians in 1002, this illumination from the Madrid Scylitzes shows klibanophoroi wearing padded epolorikia. They appear to carry kite-shields and, though it cannot be seen here, the very front figure wears splint greaves identical to those worn by the Magyar on page 19. The horses are unarmoured. (Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid)





Gilt bronze plaque of the 11th century depicting a military saint (Theodore) in the guise of a dismounted Byzantine cavalryman. His equipment comprises leather-fringed lamellar klibanion, sword suspended from a baldric, lance (shortened to fit the plaque) and decorated circular shield. The sash tied round his chest occurs in a number of sources and is probably an indication of rank. Most dismounted horsemen wear cloaks in the pictorial sources. (By courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

Garmi which dated to 838–845. On the other hand another Arab, Ibn Khordadbah, apparently also drawing on al-Garmi, seems to imply either an *overall* Tagmata strength of 6,000 soldiers and 6,000 servants (i.e. one servant per man), which would mean approximately 1,500 men per regiment if we assume all four regiments to have been of similar size; or that *each* of the Tagmata regiments was 6,000 strong. Certainly the great J. B. Bury seemed to favour the latter interpretation, for he accepted the 6,000 as applying only to the Scholae. What Ibn Khordadbah actually says is that ‘the Emperor’s camp, in his residence or in the field, consists of four divisions of cavalry commanded by a patrician,

under whom are 6,000 soldiers and 6,000 servants’. That there may have been 1,500 Scholarii, however, is indirectly supported by another source, the late 10th century *Anonymous Vari*, which says that the regiment consisted of thirty banda each under its own komes. Admittedly, at *Tactica*-strength of 300 men per bandon this would give 9,000 men, but if we were to accept Nikephoros II’s fifty-man bandon we would arrive at a much more acceptable total of 1,500.

Each of the Scholae banda may in fact be comparable to the original scholae since these too were once commanded by kometes; certainly an 8th–9th century seal is preserved which refers to the ‘komes of the Fifth Schola’. It should be noted, incidentally, that the term *scholarioi* sometimes occurs in the sources as a general description for soldiers of all four Tagmata regiments, and perhaps the *Anonymous Vari*’s thirty Scholae banda should be similarly treated.

The Scholae were commanded by a *domestikos*, as were the other Tagmata regiments (with the exception of the Arithmos or Vigla, commanded by a *dhoungarius*) with a *topoteretes* as his second-in-command. By Michael III’s reign (842–867) the Domestic of the Scholae had become senior to all but the strategos or ‘general’ of the élite Anatolikon Theme, becoming the most senior army officer, and commander-in-chief in the Emperor’s absence, during the course of the 10th century. The future Emperor Alexius I himself held this office in 1078, but the Scholae he commanded was no longer the same regiment, as is witnessed by a reference in his daughter Anna Comnena’s *Alexiad* to a Frankish mercenary in its ranks.

Next in seniority to the Scholae came the Excubiti, probably established by Leo I (457–474) and at first commanded by a komes, replaced by a domestikos in the 8th century. The latter was senior to the strategoi of the Western Themes at least by 899. The regiment’s strength is not recorded, but a reference dating to 773 supplies us with the information that there were at least eighteen banda and possibly more, but the number of men in each of these is not specified and it seems unlikely that they totalled the 300 men specified in the *Strategicon* and *Tactica*. In addition to the Excubitores, the Domestic of the Excubiti seems to have been responsible for the men called *skribones* who were

attached to theme units as medical orderlies.

The third Tagmata regiment was known by two names, Arithmos and Vigla, of which the latter is the more common in the sources. They seem to have existed at least as early as 559 and may be even older, Bury putting forward the hypothesis that their origin may be connected with the *Comites Arcadiaci* established by Arcadius (395–408). Unlike the other regiments, this one was commanded by a *dhoungarius*, though its *banda* were still commanded by *kometes*. On campaign the Vigla performed special duties, guarding the Emperor's tent at night as well as conveying his orders. They were apparently also responsible for prisoners-of-war.

The *Ikanatoi* was youngest by far of the Tagmata regiments, having been established in the 9th century by Nikephoros I (802–811). Interestingly Kodama, still drawing on al-Garmi, does not list this *tagma* at all, instead substituting *Fidaratiyin*, which is clearly the same as *Foederati*, which had been an élite unit at the time that the *Strategicon* was written and certainly still existed under that name in the early 9th century and possibly as late as 899, though its name seems later to have been changed to *Hetaereia*.

As already noted, Kodama claims that each regiment of the Tagmata comprised 4,000 men and Ibn Khordadbah implies either approximately 1,500 or 6,000 men per regiment. The only other apparent reference to their strength occurs in the *Anonymous Vari* of c. 980, which says that on campaign the Emperor should be accompanied by a minimum of 8,200 horsemen, which implies that normally there would be more—the figures of 10,000–12,000 have been suggested. Of the 8,200, 1,000 were *Hetaereia* guardsmen, leaving a minimum of 7,200 cavalry; Bury assumes these to include thematic soldiers, but it seems more probable that the *Anonymous* is referring only to the Emperor's own regiments (undoubtedly including mercenaries) accompanying him on campaign from Constantinople. Even then, probably not all of the Tagmata are intended; undoubtedly some units remained behind to guard the capital, and we know that detachments of each regiment were also posted in Macedonia, Thrace and Opsikion. Such provincial detachments were usually commanded by the Domestics' lieutenants,



Saints George and Demetrius, demonstrating cavalry equipment of c. 1100. The corselets appear to be of mail and quilt respectively. Both have pteruges. The long tunics may be evidence of Frankish influence.

the *topoteretai*, though c. 975 we hear of provincial Tagmatic units, by now posted all over the Empire, commanded by *dukes*. Provincial detachments participating in the 949 expedition against Crete comprised 493 *Scholarii*, 869 *Viglae*, 700 *Excubitores* and 456 *Ikanatoi*.

Another regiment which Kodama gives a strength of 4,000 men was the *Numeri*, an infantry unit permanently stationed in Constantinople. Probably the figure is relatively accurate since it is impossible to believe that the city could be garrisoned by any less, and even 4,000 does not seem sufficient for the purpose. The unit is only first recorded with certainty by Kodama, but the evidence indicates that it was much older. As in the cavalry regiments, its commander was a *domestikos*, assisted by a *topoteretes*, but the individual *banda* appear to have been commanded not by *kometes* but by *tribouni* or tribunes, a title which testifies to the age of the unit.

Probably the responsibilities of the Domestic of the Numeri did not go beyond the Theodosian Wall, since a separate officer called the Count of the Walls seems to have been militarily responsible for the Long Wall of Anastasius, presumably with his own unit.

The Hetaereia Basilike, another unit associated with the Tagmata, has already been mentioned. It first appears soon after the mid-9th century and was probably no more than the old Foederati under a new name, in which case—if Kodama is to be believed—it numbered an improbable 4,000; the *Anonymous*' 1,000 seems a more realistic figure. The unit's name derives from the Greek word for comrade (*hetaeros*) and should perhaps be translated in full as 'The Emperor's comrades-in-arms' or 'The Emperor's retinue'. It was a largely mercenary guard regiment probably comprising both cavalry and infantry, its members, though mainly foreigners, also including native Greeks. A detachment of the Hetaereia seems to have accompanied the Emperor at all times whenever he left the city, either on campaign or on hunting trips.

This regiment at first comprised three individual bodies, the Great Hetaereia, Middle Hetaereia and Little Hetaereia, commanded by their respective Hetaereiarchs, but the Little Hetaereia was abolished during or immediately after the reign of Basil I (867–886). Commanders of the sub-units of each Hetaereia seem likewise to have been titled Hetaereiarchs, distinguished from the senior officers by having no prefix (i.e. Great, Middle or Little). As with the Tagmatic regiments some of the Hetaereia were apparently posted in the provinces.

In addition there were other mercenary units covered by the general description of Hetaereia, in the same way that the Hetaereia itself was, in general terms, considered part of the Tagmata. These consisted of the Khazars and Pharganoi, the former recruited from a people of Turkish or Hunnic origin settled in the Caucasus, the latter from amongst Central Asian Turks living in the vicinity of Ferghana (hence their name). Ibn Rusta, who wrote *c.* 903, records that 10,000 (!) Khazars and 'Turks' (undoubtedly the Pharganoi) accompanied the Emperor on parade, and like the Hetaereia some seem to have accompanied the Emperor on campaign and in the hunt. Another unit, the Maghlavatae, also appear to have been

associated with the Hetaereia; these may have been Western Moslem (i.e. Maghribi) mercenaries. All of these were cavalry.

Enrolment as a guardsman in any one of these Hetaereia units was clearly a much-sought-after privilege, and membership was in fact purchased. It is on record that entry into the Great Hetaereia cost a minimum of sixteen pounds of gold; into the Middle Hetaereia, ten pounds; and into the Khazars and Pharganoi, seven pounds.

The Varangian Guard

One other élite unit has yet to be discussed—the famous Varangian Guard, the only Byzantine regiment that most people know by name. Their fascination derives chiefly from the incongruity of finding such men—a warband of lusty, hard-fighting, hard-drinking barbarians ('wine-bags', some sources call them!) from the far North of Europe—serving the great Emperor of Byzantium, the Christ Incarnate, amidst the pomp and splendour of the dazzling courts and sparkling palaces of the Holy City of Constantinople. Anecdotes and stories of their exploits abound in the Icelandic sagas of the 12th–13th centuries, but the glamorous reputation that they have somehow attracted over the last thousand years does not appear to be entirely deserved; one modern authority goes so far as to describe them as 'prized for their ability to act as thugs and desperadoes'!

Their name 'Varangians', used by the Russians and, through them, the Byzantines to describe Scandinavians, probably derived from the Old Norse word *vár*, meaning 'pledge', used to describe a band of men swearing loyalty to one another, observing a common code of conduct, and sharing out profits fairly amongst themselves; all in all a good description of Viking activities in their rôles both as merchant-traders and mercenaries.

Scandinavians (Swedes from Russia, in fact) first visited Constantinople in about 838. Some time

Military saints (Theodore now joins George and Demetrius) equipped as horsemen of the early 12th century. Theodore, on the left, wears a klibanion over his mail corselet; George, in the centre, wears a klibanion with pteruges at shoulder and waist; and Demetrius has now changed into a knee-length mail lorikion with elbow-length sleeves. All three have kite-shields.





This is taken from a Byzantine bowl of the 12th century, probably depicting the folk hero Diogenes Akritas. It is the only contemporary, or near-contemporary, picture which appears to exist of the shoulder tufts mentioned in Leo VI's *Tactica*. It seems fairly certain that they would not normally stand upright like this, probably a result of artistic licence.

later, in 860, following an abortive attack on the city by other Scandinavians settled in Russia, a treaty stipulated for the first time that the Emperor should receive a military levy from these 'Rus', as they were called. Though this treaty may never have been honoured, similar treaties of 911, 945 and 971 probably were; 700 Rus took part in a Byzantine attack on Crete in 911, 629 in another attack of 949, Rus auxiliaries fought against the Arabs at the Battle of Hadath in 955, and two Rus ships attended a Byzantine fleet sent against Italy in 968.

None of these bands, however, constituted regular units in permanent Byzantine employ, the first instance of the latter apparently occurring only in 988, when Emperor Basil II received as many as 6,000 men from Prince Vladimir of Kiev. These 'excellent fighters' were immediately established as the Emperor's bodyguard, largely because, as Psellus puts it, Basil 'knew the treacherous disposition of the Romans', whom he could not trust; the inference that far greater trust could be placed in the loyalty of the Varangians is borne out by Anna

Comnena, who wrote that 'they regard loyalty to the Emperors and the protection of their persons as a family tradition, a kind of sacred trust and inheritance handed down from generation to generation; this allegiance they preserve inviolate and will never brook the slightest hint of betrayal'.

Not that they were always all sweetness and light, and nor was their loyalty always above suspicion. . . . While an officer in the Guard in 1042, the future Norwegian king Harald Hardraada was accused of having misappropriated Imperial taxes, and he is claimed in the sagas to have himself blinded Emperor Michael V and kidnapped the Empress Zoe's niece Maria. Michael VII, too, was attacked by Varangian guardsmen, and in 1079 a band of drunken Varangians on duty in the palace attacked yet another Emperor, Nikephoros III Botaniates, and tried to kill him. Much later, in 1204 when the army of the Fourth Crusade was battering at the walls of Constantinople, we even find the Varangians only agreeing to fight for a new Emperor on condition that he paid them at an exorbitant rate, 'making the very acuteness of the danger an opportunity for driving a hard bargain' as a contemporary succinctly put it.

Not that their usual salary was exactly poor. The 1204 episode also supplies us with the information that the Varangians received high pay, well above that of other mercenary troops. They seem to have received as much as ten to fifteen nomismata per month (one and two-thirds to two and a half pounds of gold per annum), as well as special gratuities, a large share of the booty taken on campaign, and possibly the right to participate in a sort of ritual plundering of the Emperor's private chambers on his accession if the sagas are to be believed. Harald Hardraada amassed a vast treasure in this way, so great a hoard 'that no one in northern Europe had ever seen the like of it in one man's possession before'.

Towards the end of the 11th century the composition of the Guard began to change. The point is still much debated, but it would appear that in the first few decades following the Norman Conquest of England in 1066 an unknown number of Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Danish emigrés began to take service under the Byzantine Emperor. Cecaumenus' *Strategicon* of c. 1075-1078 appears to contain the first contemporary reference to them,

and they are occasionally referred to in documents and events of the 1080s, notably in a description of the Battle of Durazzo in 1081, where the inference is that these Englishmen formed part of the Varangian Guard. However, though there certainly were Englishmen in the Guard from c. 1081, they at first remained a minority element and many sources of the 12th century continue to speak of the Guard as being comprised of 'Danes' and 'Northmen'. Axe-armed Danes are recorded accompanying Alexius I in Anatolia in 1098, for instance, and only a few years later Saxo Grammaticus describes how 'men of the Danish (i.e. Old Norse) tongue occupy the first place'.

The Byzantine sources refer to the Varangians as 'axe-bearing barbarians' or 'the axe-bearing Guard', sometimes describing them as 'those who hang their swords from their right shoulders' (a curious description referring to the use of *rhomphaiai*); the term Tauro-Scythians is also sometimes used. The commander of the Varangians was similarly sometimes called 'the leader of the axe-bearing Guard', but his proper title was *Akolouthos* or the Acolyte, 'Follower', undoubtedly a reference to his constant proximity to the Emperor. Both he and other Varangian officers were usually of Scandinavian (or English) origin like their men, accompanied by Byzantine interpreters so that there was no language problem (though it is apparent from various anecdotes that many Guardsmen themselves learnt Greek). We still have the names of several of the Varangians' commanders, such as Ragnvald, a Swede of the 11th century who, on his memorial stone, is described as 'leader of the war-troop in the land of the Greeks'; Harald Hardrada, who, though not the Acolyte, held a senior rank in the Guard c. 1035–1044 and commanded about 500 men; and Nampites, Acolyte in the 1080s, probably a Scandinavian nickname meaning 'Biter of Corpses' or 'Bird of Prey'.

The Theme System

Themes, or *themata*, provincial army-corps districts, first began to appear at some time during the 7th century, initially only in Asia Minor. Though Emperor Heraclius is usually credited with the

introduction of this system it seems far more probable that Constans II and Constantine IV were responsible, establishing the first themes in Anatolia to defend the Empire's eastern frontier against Arab incursions.

By the 10th century most themes were commanded by military governors called strategoi, or generals (though the Opsikion Theme had a *komes* and the Optimaton a *domestikos*), each of whom had his own full-time, personal military retinue of *spatharioi* organized in units of 100 men commanded by officers called *kentarchai spathariorum*; the size of this retinue varied from theme to theme, but we know from one source that the retinue of the strategos of the Thrakesion Theme comprised six *kentarchiai* (i.e. two *banda*). In addition the strategos was assisted by three civic officials—the *protonotarius*, responsible for financial administration (including the soldiers' pay), the *praetor* for law and administration, and the *chartularius* for taxation and revenue.

The forces at the disposal of the strategoi were soldier-farmers, freemen each holding a plot of



10th century Arab horseman. The Arabs had been the Empire's main enemy since the 7th century, and Emperor Leo VI said that it was the ever-present Moslem threat that convinced him of the need to write his military manual.

agricultural land within the theme in part-payment for mounted military service performed by one of the estate-holder's family (or by proxy) as, when and where required. These smallholdings were hereditary by the holder's eldest son so long as he also took on his father's military obligations. Many thematic soldiers had servants, and the richer ones could even afford to own slaves, and it was these richer or greater landowners who provided the 'first-class' thematic cavalry mentioned by Leo VI in his *Tactica*, their higher income guaranteeing the superior equipment that this status would require. Others were comparatively poor, and in the early 9th century legislation had even been introduced obliging poorer thematic

soldiers to club together so as to adequately equip one of their number to serve (a thematic soldier's arms, armour and horse belonging not to the individual himself but to the estate for which he served). Nikephoros II seems to have introduced additional legislation so that wealthier soldiers might now be expected to help equip their poorer neighbours. Even then equipment was sometimes sub-standard, and uniformity was probably generally lacking; at best only shields, lance-pennons and crests are likely to have been uniform within a thematic unit, though it is possible that some may have worn uniform-coloured clothing like the central army corps in Constantinople. Men financially unable to fulfil their obligation to supply an armed horseman, even with the assistance of others, were evicted from their land and transferred to the irregulars, called literally 'cattle-lifters' (which neatly describes their principal form of sustenance), responsible for supplying garrisons for the Empire's many fortresses. Deserters suffered the same fate.

New themes were created either by the subdivision of old ones or by the expansion of the frontier, in which case units would be detached from other themes to form the military nucleus for

Key to map: 1 Kalabria, 2 Langobardia, 3 Dalmatia, 4 Sirmium, 5 Dyrrachium, 6 Bulgaria, 7 Nikopolis, 8 Kephallonia, 9 Peloponnesos, 10 Hellas, 11 Thessalonika, 12 Strymon, 13 Macedonia, 14 Paristrion, 15 Thrace, 16 Abydos, 17 Chios, 18 Aegean Pelaghos, 19 Krete, 20 Samos, 21 Kibyrriaiots, 22 Thrakesion, 23 Opsikion, 24 Optimaton, 25 Bukellarion, 26 Paphlagonia, 27 Anatolikon, 28 Seleukeia, 29 Kypros, 30 Kappadocia, 31 Kilikia, 32 Charsianon, 33 Armeniakon, 34 Sebasteia, 35 Lykandos, 36 Antiocheia, 37 Teluch, 38 Poleis Parephratidiai (Euphrates Cities), 39 Melitene, 40 Koloneia, 41 Mesopotamia, 42 Taron, 43 Iberia, 44 Chaldia, 45 Theodosiopolis (Taik'), 46 Vaspurakan, 47 Cherson (Gothia). In addition the Serbs and Croats, assorted Armenian and Iberian principalities, the Lombard principalities of Salerno, Capua and Benevento, and the Amirate of Aleppo all paid tribute, while Venice, Naples, Amalfi and Gaeta were still nominally Byzantine towns.





Magyar horseman with captive. At the time that Leo VI actually wrote his *Tactica* the Magyars were the Empire's other principal foe, though they could also be found as mercenaries in the Byzantine army. The armour worn here could almost be straight from an Imperial arsenal, with mail coif and corselet, iron helmet and splint-armour greaves and vambraces. His captive wears lamellar. (Kunsthistorischen Museum, Vienna)

the new province (for instance when Leo VI created the Charsianon Theme he transferred to it three banda from Bukellarion, two banda from Armeniakon, and a whole turma plus one bandon from Kappadocia). Some themes grew from other fortified frontier districts called *kleisourai* (the name means 'mountain passes') where noble families called *akritai* or 'borderers' maintained their own forts and retinues in almost feudal fashion. Younger sons of thematic landholders often lived on frontier estates too, supplementing the manpower of theme or kleisoura.

The troops of each theme were organized into two or three turmai or merai which, as explained earlier, were in turn subdivided into moirai or dhoungoi, each comprising a number of banda. Ibn Khordadbah, who wrote *c.* 845, describes the organization of one of the larger themes (10,000 men) as two turmai each comprising five 'banda' (presumably moirai are meant) of 1,000 men, each of these 'banda' being subdivided into five units of 200 men called *pentarchiai* and commanded by

kometes (therefore probably banda). Each pentarchia, Ibn Khordadbah tells us, consisted of five units of forty men commanded by 'kontarhin' (probably meaning kentarchai or pentekontarchai, the units therefore presumably understrength allaghia or hekatontarchia).

It seems apparent, in fact, that the strength of thematic units must have varied considerably according to the size and manpower of each individual theme, and the variation in total numbers of troops available from theme to theme is apparent in the lists of the Eastern Themes recorded by Ibn al-Fakih al-Hamadhani (who wrote *c.* 902) and Kodama (*c.* 930), which are given below:

	<i>Ibn al-Fakih</i>	<i>Kodama</i>
Anatolikon	15,000	15,000
Thrakesion	10,000	6,000
Chaldia	10,000	4,000
Armeniakon	9,000	9,000
Bukellarion	8,000	8,000
Opsikion	6,000	6,000
Paphlagonia	5,000	5,000
Seleukeia	—	5,000
Macedonia	5,000	—
Thrace	5,000	—
Kappadocia	4,000	4,000
Charsianon	4,000	4,000
Optimaton	4,000	4,000
	<u>85,000</u>	<u>70,000</u>

These lists together provide a relatively complete inventory of the Eastern Themes as they stood *c.* 900 except that they omit Koloneia (probably about 6,000 men), Mesopotamia (probably about 4,000), the kleisourai of Sebasteia, Lykandos and Leontokomis (no more than a couple of thousand each), and mistakenly include the non-military Optimaton Theme, which had perhaps been demoted to its reduced status (as an army service corps) as a result of some earlier rebellion (it is last recorded as a combatant corps in 773). When listing the Eastern provinces the Arab sources also mention an additional theme called Talaya, Talaka or Tafla in the vicinity of Constantinople itself. This is otherwise unknown and its name is possibly no more than an Arabic corruption of

Tagmata; as a region it may represent the command of the Count of the Walls (see earlier), the Long Wall of Anastasius marking its western frontier. Unfortunately the lists do not give us its strength.

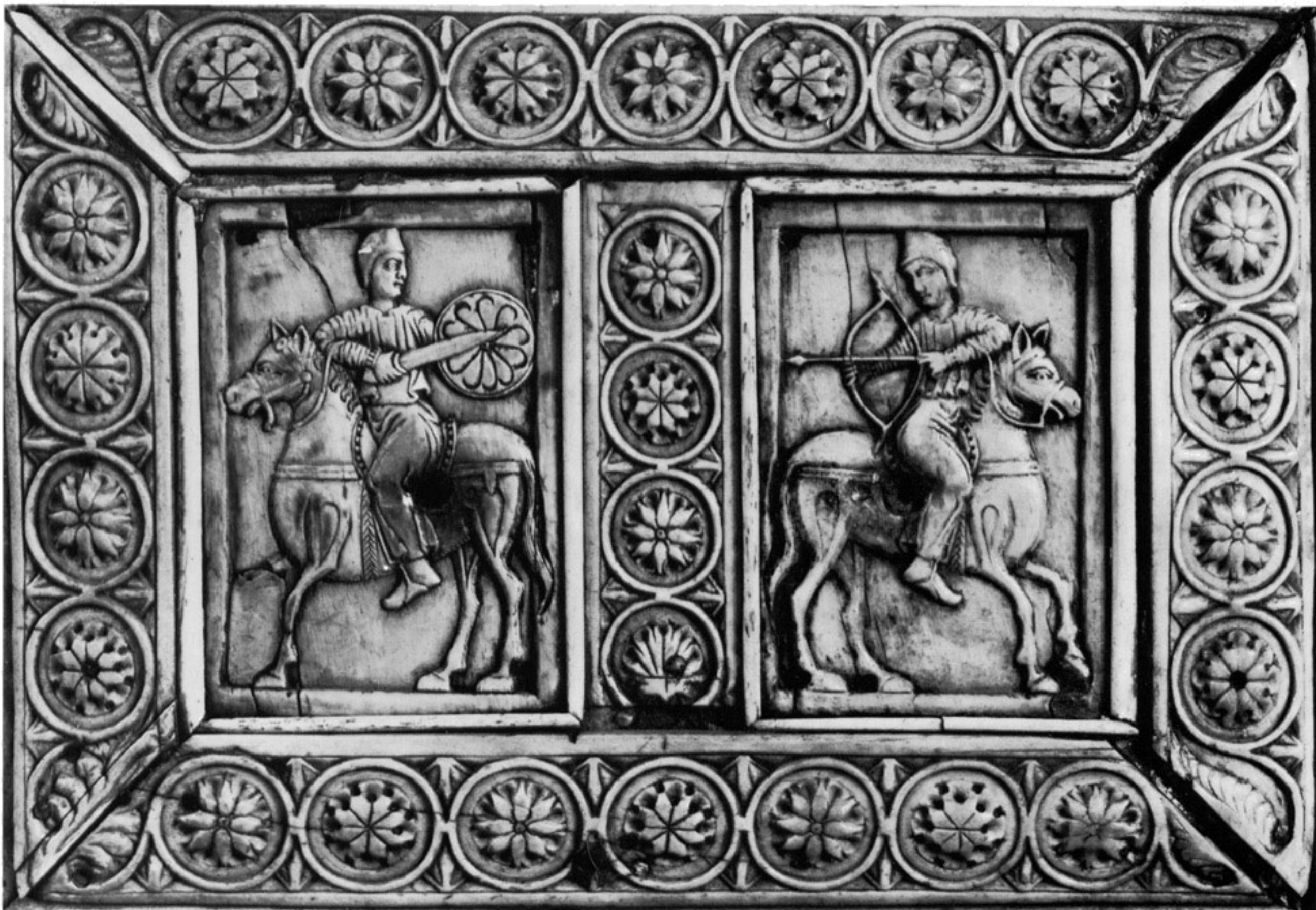
Nor do the sources give us the strengths of the Western or three Naval Themes, which Leo VI's salary schedule lists as comprising Kibyrrhaiots, Aegean Pelaghos and Samos (naval) and Peloponnesos, Nikopolis, Hellas, Sicily, Langobardia, Strymon, Kephalaria, Thessalonika, Dyrrachium, Dalmatia and Cherson. However, the Western Themes were always regarded as inferior to the strategically more important Eastern Themes and their strengths would have been correspondingly lower.

Fairly certainly the figures given by Ibn al-Fakih and Kodama only represent the cavalry, which were the backbone of every Byzantine army. Leo's

A number of 10th–12th-century ivory caskets depict figures such as these. They fairly certainly represent Asiatic mercenaries, probably Patzinaks. The apparent 'trouserless' tunic is probably a long coat split at front and back for riding. Note the pointed felt or fur cap, characteristic of Patzinak dress. (Victoria and Albert Museum, London)

Tactica tells us that each theme could provide at the most 4,000 first-class cavalry, who he describes as *kataphractoï* and were therefore presumably mounted on armoured or half-armoured horses, so the balance were presumably less well-equipped and of lower quality. Certainly it seems to have been preferable to summon first-class soldiers from a neighbouring theme in an emergency rather than to rely on one's own second-class troops. Leo also states that without drawing more than 4,000 men from each the Eastern Themes could put 30,000 horsemen in the field, which would still leave a healthy reserve to fall back on.

In addition there were also thematic infantry, about whom little information is available. It is possible that they did not receive land grants like the cavalry but were instead recruited by conscription, though some must have been employed on a more permanent basis. The *Tactica* seems to imply that a single theme could muster as many as 24,000 infantry, who would have presumably been divided into first and second classes like the cavalry. Many of these would have been light troops.





As time went on the theme system began to break down, since the strategoi and their senior officers, who had become big landowners within their themes, began to utilize their combined civil and military authority to transform their lands into hereditary semi-independent possessions, the soldier-farmers of their estates becoming a sort of private army. Though they were aware of what was happening the central administration could do little to prevent this transformation. In fact the Imperial government had no option but to grant even more rights and concessions to this new provincial aristocracy in order to retain its military support, even to the point of issuing chrysobulls which exempted the estates of the greatest landowners from paying any taxes at all. Inevitably, and despite assorted legislative measures, more and more of the small thematic landowners were slowly squeezed out and their smallholdings absorbed into the great estates, which effectively reduced the fighting strength of the theme; the *Hudud al-Alam*, a Persian source written *c.* 982, states that each of the Eastern Themes could raise only 3,000 to 6,000 men, while a Byzantine source of *c.* 970 rates the full cavalry strength of each theme at no more than 3,000.

It was as a result of this decline that Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas (963–969), himself risen

Turks attack a Byzantine fortress, from the Scylitzes manuscript. On the left are unarmoured horse-archers, on the right heavy cavalry in corselets and helmets. The defenders are hurling down javelins from the battlements. (Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid)

from the ranks of the thematic landowning aristocracy, ran down and disbanded the native troops in some of the themes, the strategoi now frequently employing mercenary units in their place. This increasing reliance on mercenaries, compared to the low quality to which some of the native thematic soldiers had sunk, is apparent in the description of a thematic muster of 1067, where the army is described as comprised mainly of Macedonian (Slavs), Bulgars, Kappadocians (probably Armenians), Uzes, Franks, Varangians and ‘other mercenaries who happened to be about’. The few native Byzantine troops are described as ‘bent over by poverty and distress and devoid of armour. Instead of swords and other military arms . . . they carried hunting spears and scythes . . . and they were without horses and other equipment. Because no Emperor had taken the field for many years they were (considered) for this reason unprofitable and unnecessary, and their salary and customary maintenance had been taken away.’ Most alarming of all, this is allegedly a description of the Anatolikon troops, élite of the Eastern Themes.

- 1 Skutatos, 11th-12th centuries
2 Skutatos, c.950
3 Peltastos, c.975
4 Skutatos, 10th century





- 1 Servant, 10th - 11th centuries
- 2 Pack-mules, 10th century
- 3 Unarmoured infantryman, 11th-12th centuries
- 4 Psilos, 10th century

- 1 Kataphractus, 10th century
2 Cavalry standard-bearer, 11th-12th centuries
3 Kataphractus, c.1050



Klibanophoros, c.970





- 1 Guard officer, c.880
- 2 Emperor in parade armour, c.1017
- 3 Member of the Basilikoi Anthropoi, c.880

- 1 Rus mercenary, c.950
2 Varangian Guardsman, c.1000
3 Varangian Guardsman in dress uniform, c.1030





1 Trapezitos, 10th century
2 Patzinak mercenary, 11th century

1 Seljuk mercenary, 11th-12th centuries
2 & 3 Italo-Norman mercenaries, late 11th century



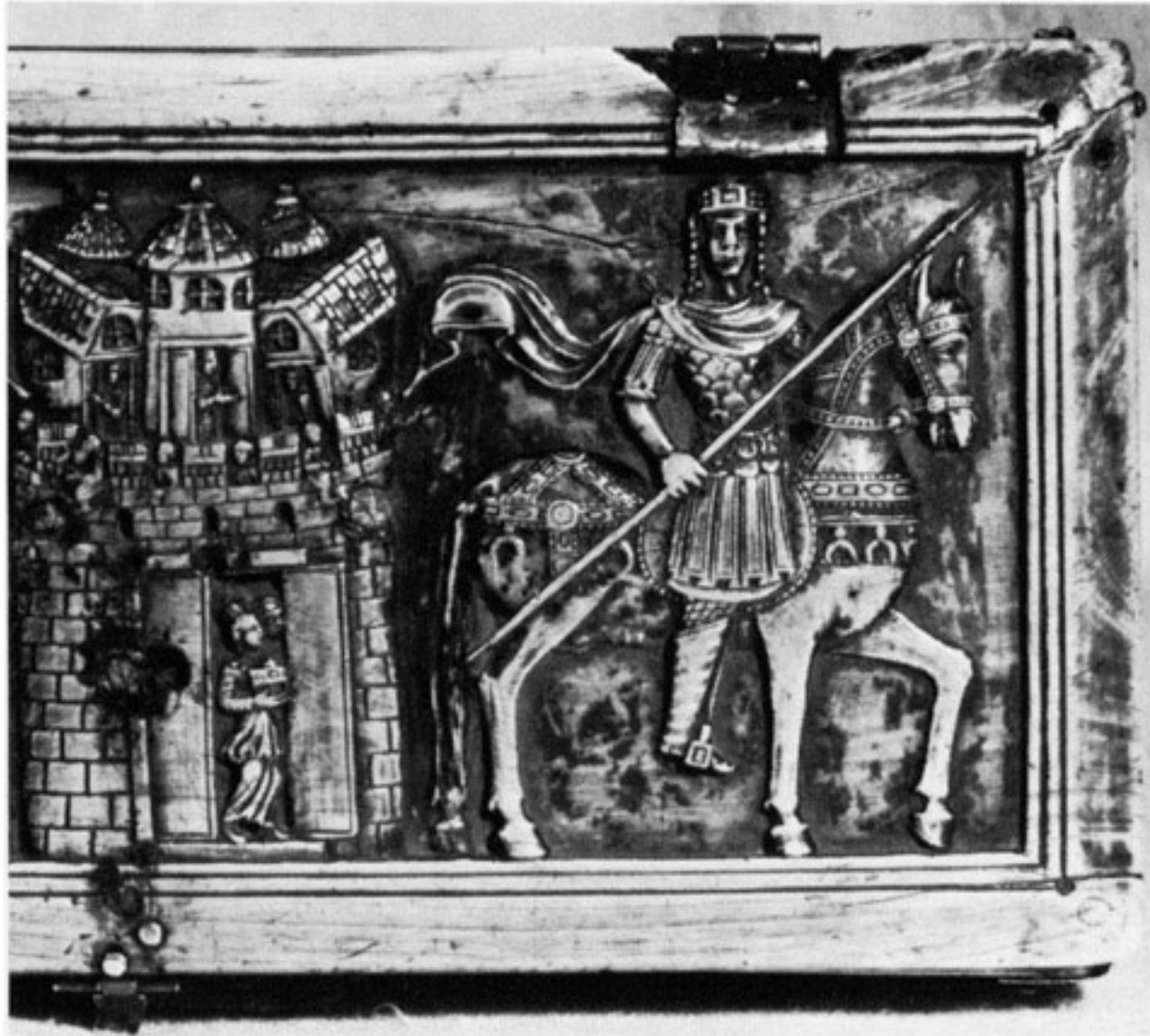


Seljuk chieftain in characteristic costume, complete with cased bow at left hip. Between the Seljuks' first appearance on the Empire's eastern frontier as an obscure Turkish tribe and their decisive defeat of the Byzantines at Manzikert in 1071, a period of only fifty years had elapsed. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund 1951)

Right: Victorious Byzantine Emperor receiving the submission of an enemy city, from the Troyes casket. Except for the crown the equipment worn is identical to that of the horsemen on the front of the casket, shown on page 7. (Trésor de la Cathédrale, Troyes)

The principal reason for this drastic decline in the quality of the theme armies, other than the territorial ambitions of the strategoi, was the struggle for political power which had broken out in the course of the 10th century between the generals in the provinces and the bureaucrats in Constantinople. The generals' ambitions were held in check relatively successfully up until Basil II's death in 1025, but thereafter the struggle became more violent. The next thirty years saw an average of one major provincial revolt by the generals per annum, and in 1057 one of their number, Isaac Comnenus, actually succeeded in seizing the Imperial throne for two years.

Inevitably, when they got the chance the bureaucrats' reaction to these constant revolts was to disband units, to convert the obligations of others into *adaeratio* (a form of scutage or taxation in lieu of



Norman knights from a porch at the church of San Nicola at Bari, c. 1087. The city of Bari, the Empire's last stronghold on the Italian mainland, fell to the Normans under Robert Guiscard in 1071. The figures are very similar to those in the Bayeux Tapestry. Note both underarm and overarm use of the lance. (Tim Benton)



military service), to dismiss and execute generals, and to cut off the pay and maintenance grants on which thematic soldiers lived. Constantine IX, for instance, who ruled 1042–1055, entirely disbanded the army of the important frontier theme of Iberia, perhaps 5,000 men, and converted its obligations from military service to the payment of tax, and we frequently read in the sources of other thematic armies 'in want of their pay and deprived of the provisions which were usually supplied to them'.

It was such measures as these, together with the dreadful squandering of manpower which the civil wars involved, and the steady elimination of

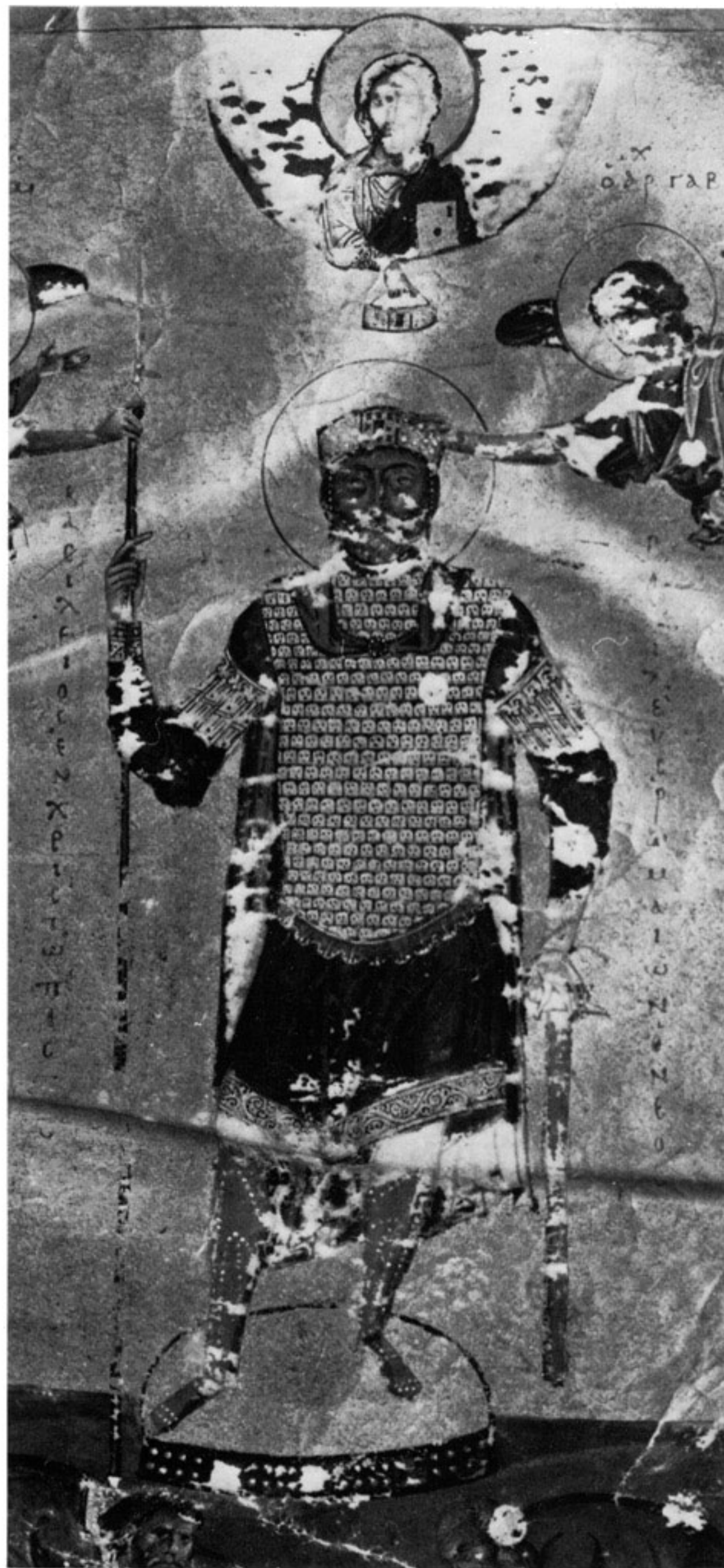
military smallholdings by the provincial magnates, that led to the deterioration and demoralization of the Byzantine army in the years which preceded Manzikert, and not even the disastrous defeat that they suffered there could halt the process.

MERCENARIES

Though Byzantine armies had nearly always included considerable contingents of mercenaries in their ranks this particular period saw a rapid increase in their numbers, as a result of the declining strength of the thematic armies. As the struggle between bureaucrats and generals dragged on, more and more mercenary troops came to be employed in place of understrength, low-quality or disbanded thematic units. By Nikephoros II's reign most if not all light cavalry consisted of Asiatic horse-archers, and by the mid-11th century more than half the men in most Byzantine armies were mercenaries of diverse ethnic origins.

Most of these mercenary soldiers were supplied by various Turkish peoples, amongst whom the Patzinaks took pride of place, but many other nations were also represented. Frankish chroniclers of the First Crusade frequently refer to the many mercenary types in Alexius I's armies, particularly the Patzinaks, Cumans, Uzes and Turks. One anonymous chronicler recorded that in 1096 there were in Constantinople, in addition to Greeks, 'Bulgars, Alans, Cumans, Patzinaks, Italians, Venetians, Romans, Dacians, Englishmen, Amalfitans, and even Turks and many gentiles, Jews and proselytes, Cretans, Arabs and peoples of all nations'; and although some of these—such as the Venetians, Amalfitans and Jews—were merchants or artisans most would undoubtedly have been serving in the army. Certainly contingents of most of these peoples, and more besides, were present in the Byzantine army destroyed at Manzikert (see below). Anna Comnena refers to mercenaries in her father's time as 'horsemen and footmen coming out of all lands'.

Many were supplied as self-contained units under their own leaders and officers by the Empire's satellite states and vassals. Such contingents were referred to as *symmachoi* or allies, like the old Roman *symmachiarii*. The term was used of Patzinaks, Serbs, Uzes and Russians during the 11th century.



A portrait of c. 1017 of Basil II (976–1025), called *Bulgaroctonos* or 'Killer of Bulgars'. A superb soldier, contemporaries reported that at the very sight of his banner the enemy used to flee, screaming, 'Run! Run! It is the Emperor!' It was he who totally subjugated Bulgaria, in addition scoring victories over Armenians, Georgians, Arabs and Normans. Had he lived another ten years he would have reconquered probably the Empire's long-lost Italian and Egyptian provinces too. His own reign followed on from those of two other brilliant generals, the Emperors Nikephoros II Phokas (whose stupendous victories over the Arabs won him, from their own lips, the title of 'The White Death'), and John I Tzimiskes, who but for his premature death in 976 would have reconquered completely the Holy Land, lost to the Arabs as long ago as 634. Not without reason has the era 963–1025 been christened by some as Byzantium's 'Age of Conquest'. (Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice)

Bearing in mind that even at their zenith in the 9th and 10th centuries only the largest themes could raise as many as 4,000 first-class cavalry, such mercenaries were employed in considerable numbers. 15,000 Patzinaks were hired in 1049, there were 3,000 Normans in Byzantine employ in the immediate post-Manzikert era, and in 1078 there were in various armies 2,000 Seljuk Turks, 6,000 Alans and 8,000 Normans, in addition to unknown numbers of Patzinaks and Italians. In 1091 there may have been as many as 40,000 Cumans fighting alongside the Byzantines at Levunium.

Inevitably there were drawbacks, however. The loyalty of mercenaries was often questionable—particularly that of Frankish contingents, who had an inflated opinion of their own value—and bribes and other expensive inducements sometimes proved necessary before mercenary troops would fight at all. And if their pay was not forthcoming (which proved so often to be the case) mercenaries had distressing habits like changing sides halfway through a battle or campaign or looting friendly (Byzantine) territory!

'The Terrible Day': Manzikert 1071

Armenia, once the Empire's principal recruiting ground but now left practically defenceless by the disbandment of its thematic armies, was in the hands of the Seljuk Turks by 1067. This loss was followed by almost continuous Turkish incursions into the Anatolian heartlands of the Empire, and it soon became painfully obvious that its Eastern frontier could only be successfully defended by the reconquest of the lost Armenian territories. In 1071 there came an opportunity to achieve this.

Early that year the Seljuk Sultan, Alp Arslan (the name means 'Mountain Lion'), had set out for Syria with the intention of seizing Fatimid-held Damascus prior to launching an attack on Egypt. En route he attacked several Byzantine-held towns, as did one of his lieutenants, Afsin, whose own activities included the capture of the fortresses of Manzikert and Argis during January. Afsin's

forces, however, were now snowed up in the Tzamandus Pass and stood no chance of moving until the spring thaw set in.

Meanwhile, taking advantage of Alp Arslan's extensive advance, Emperor Romanus IV Diogenes had prepared an offensive in the Seljuk rear, assembling a huge army at Erzerum, some eighty miles from Manzikert, in spring 1071. The actual size of the army is debatable; two sources claim 300,000 men, while others claim 200,000, 400,000 and 600,000, Matthew of Edessa even going so far as to say it was one million strong! Exaggerations aside, however, all the sources agree that it was an abnormally large army. The 12th century Moslem chronicler Imad ad-Din has left us with details of its cosmopolitan composition, recording in addition to Byzantines contingents of Russians, Khazars, Alans, Uzes, Cumans, Georgians, Armenians and Franks (who appear to have been chiefly Normans and Germans); Matthew of Edessa adds Crimean Goths, Patzinaks and Bulgars. The native Byzantine elements had been gathered from most of the Western and all of the Eastern Themes, though the once-élite Anatolikon troops were notable only by the smallness of their numbers. In addition the Emperor was accompanied by a contingent of Varangian Guards and the cavalry of the Tagmata.

The largest part of the army consisted of engineers, labourers and servants, the former necessary to operate the siege-engines which constituted a major part of the baggage-train of 'thousands' of wagons. At the most, then, it seems probable that only some forty per cent of the 'huge army' actually consisted of combatants, of whom only a fraction were Byzantine and very few of those regulars; the remainder were seemingly poor in quality, ill-trained, ill-equipped and ill-disciplined thematic troops, their low standard being a direct consequence of the running down of the military establishment by Romanus' anti-military predecessors. In addition some of the mercenary elements were so unruly that there was even a pitched battle with the German contingent following looting incidents; it proved necessary to call the rest of the army to arms before the German mutiny could be put down!

It was only after the beginning of May, while encamped before Aleppo, that Alp Arslan received the news of Romanus' advance on Armenia.

Immediately he abandoned his planned move on Damascus and withdrew towards Mosul, so rapidly that his army was scattered far and wide, many of his untrustworthy Iraqi auxiliaries taking the opportunity to desert. In addition the Seljuks lost large numbers of horses crossing the Euphrates. In fact, to a Byzantine observer in Syria, Alp Arslan's retreat gave the impression of a veritable rout, and it was probably this information which finally convinced Romanus that he should launch a full-scale attack rather than merely contenting himself with partially restoring the old Armenian frontier defences.

Therefore in June or July, in preparation for his general advance into Vaspurakan, he divided his army in two, sending out a large force of Frankish and Turkish auxiliaries under the Norman commander Roussel de Bailleul to lay waste the region round Manzikert and Akhlat. Advised of the Byzantine movements by refugees from this area, Alp Arslan now set out northwards from Mosul to intercept Romanus, sending ahead one of his most distinguished officers ('Soundaq the Turk' the sources call him) with about 5,000 men to reinforce Akhlat. The Sultan himself was accompanied at first only by his 4,000 personal mamluks, his scattered army having failed to reassemble, and the seriousness of the situation did not permit him the time necessary to return to the heart of his own territory in the East to gather fresh troops; instead he summoned them to join him on the march, and recruited in addition some 10,000 local Kurdish tribesmen.

Romanus in his turn had probably got wind by now of Alp Arslan's approach; he despatched a body of (allegedly) 20,000 men, apparently Cuman or possibly Russian heavy cavalry under a Georgian officer, Joseph Tarchaniotes, to the aid of the Franks and Turks now approaching Akhlat, enabling the latter force to set itself up safely before the town. In the meantime the remainder of the army successfully retook Manzikert after the briefest of sieges.

It was only then that the Byzantines first became aware that part of the Seljuk relief force had actually arrived in the area, for on the morning of 16 August Soundaq encountered and defeated a large foraging party. Romanus immediately despatched one of his generals, Nikephoros Bryennius

(undoubtedly the same man who later became Dux of Dyrrachium and rebelled against Michael VII) to deal with Soundaq, but he was repulsed and had to be reinforced by a second detachment under Basilakes, strategos of the Theodosiopolis Theme. Weight of numbers now forced Soundaq to withdraw. Whether this withdrawal was a feigned flight or not will never be known; but the pursuing Byzantines, caution thrown to the wind, were caught in a sudden counter-attack in which Basilakes himself was captured, together with his standard, and Bryennius was wounded. At the same time Tarchaniotes and Roussel de Bailleul, also having suffered heavy losses in engagements with Soundaq and receiving news that Alp Arslan himself had now arrived too, pulled out of Akhlat and withdrew as far as Melitene.

By the time Romanus had marshalled the bulk of his army Soundaq's force, in true Seljuk style, was nowhere to be found. So the army returned to camp (a contingent of 'loyal' citizens recruited in Manzikert taking the opportunity to desert), and an anxious night was passed under the eyes and arrows of the Seljuks who, joined by Alp Arslan and his main army, now set up their own camp only three miles away.

Yet the Sultan's army, as Romanus' scouts must now have informed him, was considerably smaller than that of the Byzantines. The lowest recorded estimate is 12,000, while Ibn al-Athir says 15,000, but the higher figures of 30,000–40,000 or possibly more seem more probable. But, at the same time, the Byzantine army was itself now considerably smaller than it had been at the outset of the campaign; the detachments of Roussel and Tarchaniotes had not returned, there had been casualties in the skirmishes with Soundaq—really battles in their own right—and to feed his massive army it had been necessary for Romanus to send out large numbers of foraging parties, even as far off as Georgia, to gather provisions. In fact, the Byzantine army had apparently been reduced to only 100,000, and of these many must have been non-combatants.

Next morning an embassy was sent by Alp Arslan with an offer of peace, which was scornfully rejected—since it would be financially impossible to raise such an army again for a long time to come, Romanus had little choice but to force a decisive

solution there and then. Besides, he had the utmost confidence in the size, if not the quality, of his army and in his own ability to achieve a signal victory. Further, he suspected that the Sultan had only now realized the still considerable numerical superiority the Byzantines enjoyed and intended the peace offer merely as a delaying tactic while reinforcements were summoned.

Admittedly a delay might also have been on the side of the Byzantines—it would have given Tarchaniotes, Roussel de Bailleul and at least some of the foraging detachments time to return; but at the same time delay would also give the army, discouraged by the inauspicious handling of the campaign to date and distrustful of the Armenian and Turkish contingents in its midst, the opportunity to sink to an all-time low in morale and to become even more undisciplined than it already was. In addition, more mercenaries might mutiny or desert. Logically, therefore, a delay which would probably see the Byzantines stronger in numbers but dangerously low in morale, and the Seljuks greatly increased in both numbers and confidence, could not be contemplated. It is hardly surprising, then, that despite advice to the contrary from his many generals, Romanus decided that he would commit the army to battle. The die was cast.

On 18 August both sides prepared for the forthcoming engagement, which the Seljuks planned to take place on the following day, Friday—the Moslem Sabbath. None of Romanus' larger detachments returned during the day, in fact quite the opposite—a number of Uz mercenaries under a certain Tamis decided to change sides during 17 or 18 August, possibly because they were Turks like the Seljuks, but more probably because their pay was months in arrears. They slipped quietly away and entered the Seljuk camp in a body, where further Moslem reinforcements from Akhlat and Manzikert had also arrived. Tarchaniotes, meanwhile, apparently had no intention of returning, and as it happened neither had Roussel. The only action of the day saw the archers of the Byzantine army marching out of their fortified camp and successfully driving off Alp Arslan's skirmishers with heavy losses.

Details of the Battle of Manzikert itself are unclear and are sometimes contradictory since of all the sources only one (the *Historia* of Attaliates)



Figures of this type seem to start appearing in the 10th century and are often thought to be Varangian Guardsmen. They only ever appear in biblical crucifixion scenes, however, and wear a type of headdress which in Byzantine art is normally associated with Jews. But at the same time their rich panoply certainly suggests that artists may have used the equipment of guardsmen as their model, and interestingly this figure has a raven-like bird emblazoned on his shield, which could certainly associate him with a Scandinavian origin.

was written by an eye-witness, but it is certain that on the morning of 19 August Romanus drew up his army in the customary two lines. The first consisted of three divisions—the right of the thematic troops of Kappadocia, Armeniakon and Charsianon plus Uz mercenaries, under Alyattes (strategos of the Kappadocia Theme); the centre of the central Eastern Themes and the Tagmata under Romanus himself; and the left of the Western Themes, together with Patzinaks and other auxiliaries, under Nikephoros Bryennius. The second, or reserve line was under the command of Andronikos Dukas, a nephew of the previous Emperor and therefore no friend of Romanus—a factor which was going to prove decisive; it was comprised of German and Norman mercenary heavy cavalry, the majority of the *archontes* (noblemen and their contingents) from the Eastern borderlands, and a

large part of the Hetaeria. No troops at all were left to guard the camp.

Their advance across the plain of Manzikert towards the Seljuk camp, which could not have started until well after midday, was virtually unopposed except for skirmishes on the extreme flanks, where the Byzantine commanders must have kept a wary eye on their own Turkish auxiliaries following the desertion of Tamiş Uzes, particularly since the flanks lacked any security in the open. But the bulk of the Seljuk army retired steadily before them in feigned flight, drawing the Byzantines on until in the late afternoon or early evening they came to the abandoned Seljuk camp site. At this point Romanus seems to have doubted the wisdom of advancing further, and fearing a Seljuk attack on his own camp, undefended in his rear, he gave the order to retire, turning the Imperial standard towards the rear.

But the order was misunderstood. In the failing light only the centre turned as ordered while the flanks hesitated, apparently confused. Simultaneously a rumour swept through the reserve line,

treacherously put about by Dukas himself, that the Emperor had been killed. Watching from the heights nearby, the incredulous Seljuks saw in the chaos on the plain below them the opportunity they had been awaiting. At that moment, with the Byzantines' first line disorganized and facing in every direction with gaps between its centre and flanks, Alp Arslan led 10,000 fresh Seljuk cavalry to the charge.

Almost immediately a rout ensued as the Byzantines panicked, believing themselves betrayed by either the Armenians or the army's Turkish auxiliaries; in fact the Armenians were the first to flee the field and practically all got away, while by contrast the majority of the Uzes and Patzinaks remained loyal to the end. The right wing of the Byzantine army soon disintegrated,

A rare picture of bearded Varangians in full armour, here attending the execution of an Anti-Emperor. Eighteen of their famous axes are in evidence, together with spears and unit standards. Note the mixture of circular and kite-shields. (Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid)





Early 10th-century skutatoi, from the Joshua Roll. Note 'shield-wall' use of the large shields. The figures with cloaks wrapped round their bodies are officers, one of whom carries a bandon standard. (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome)

weakened by the gradual desertion of the Kapadocians, though the left, despite being cut off from the centre and attacked in flank and rear, only broke after a hard fight. Dukas, blithely disregarding his duties as commander of the desperately needed reserve line—which might still have saved the day—had already withdrawn from the field without committing his men. Bryennius, another Byzantine historian, states flatly 'the rearguard withdrew immediately'.

Only the centre stood, where Romanus fought on, wounded and with his horse shot from under him, until he was recognized by his costume and by the Varangian Guards crowded round him and captured by a Seljuk slave-soldier—the first time that a Byzantine Emperor had ever been taken prisoner by Moslems. The last few Byzantine units still holding together gave way at this, and a close and bloody pursuit of the scattered army continued throughout the night.

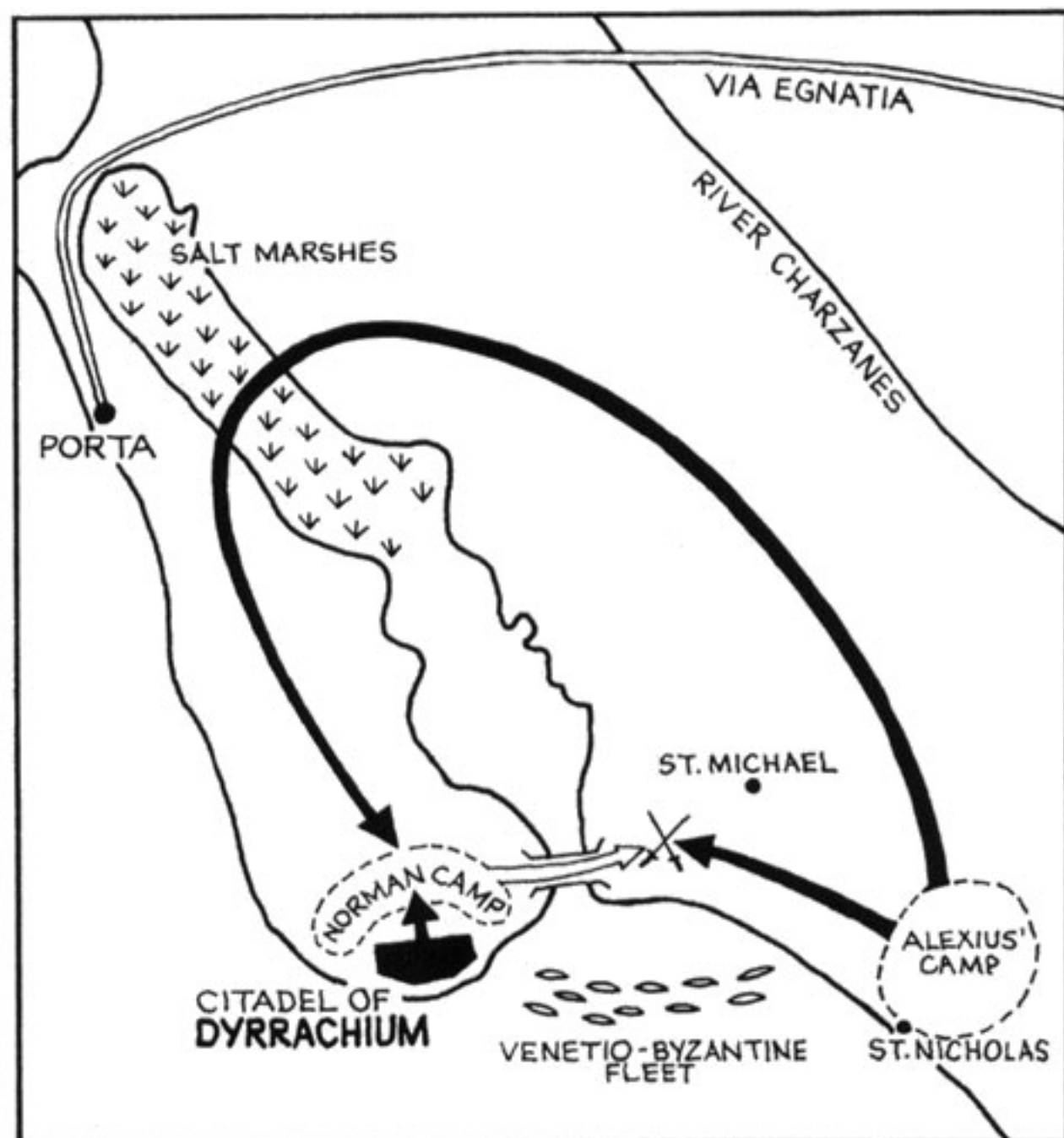
One Emperor had once said that 'the army is to the state what the head is to the body'. That body had now been decapitated, and the execution marked the end of Byzantine military greatness.

The Post-Manzikert Period

Manzikert saw the end of the traditional Byzantine army. Most of the Tagmatic regiments were destroyed on the battlefield and those that survived disappeared from the scene soon after. Likewise the forces of the Eastern Themes, understrength as they were, had been annihilated; and with them gone, much of Anatolia was soon overrun by the victorious Turks, many of whom were short-sightedly introduced as mercenaries by Romanus' immediate successors, Michael VII (1071–1078) and Nikephoros III (1078–1081).

The destruction of the Eastern thematic armies in fact left the Empire practically defenceless, and though a new central army soon began to appear in the capital, responsibility for the Empire's exposed Eastern frontiers devolved largely onto an ever-increasing number of mercenary regiments comprised mainly of Normans, Turks, Cumans and Patzinaks. The widespread disappearance of thematic troops and the parallel increase in the Empire's reliance on mercenaries were without doubt the principal results of Manzikert militarily speaking, setting a trend which was to continue unabated for the rest of the Empire's history.

Cash was short, however, and the Imperial Treasury exhausted, and before very long many soldiers, both natives and mercenaries, were living on, and being paid with, new land-grants called *pronoiai*, in existence as early as the 10th century but only becoming regularly associated with military service in the post-Manzikert period. Unlike the holder of a thematic land-grant the holder of a *pronoia*, called a *stratiotes* or *pronoiaros*, received in addition tax-relief as well as extra payment in the form of cash and/or kind, so he was financially considerably better off than an old thematic soldier—though *pronoiai* were not hereditary (at least until the 13th century). Many Byzantine noblemen were also now receiving *pronoiai* in exchange for military service as cavalrymen, perhaps accompanied by personal retinues of predetermined size. The one real disadvantage of the *pronoia* system, however, was that it cost the Empire a huge amount of money in lost taxation revenue which, in turn, meant effectively that it could afford to maintain fewer and fewer soldiers on a regular basis.

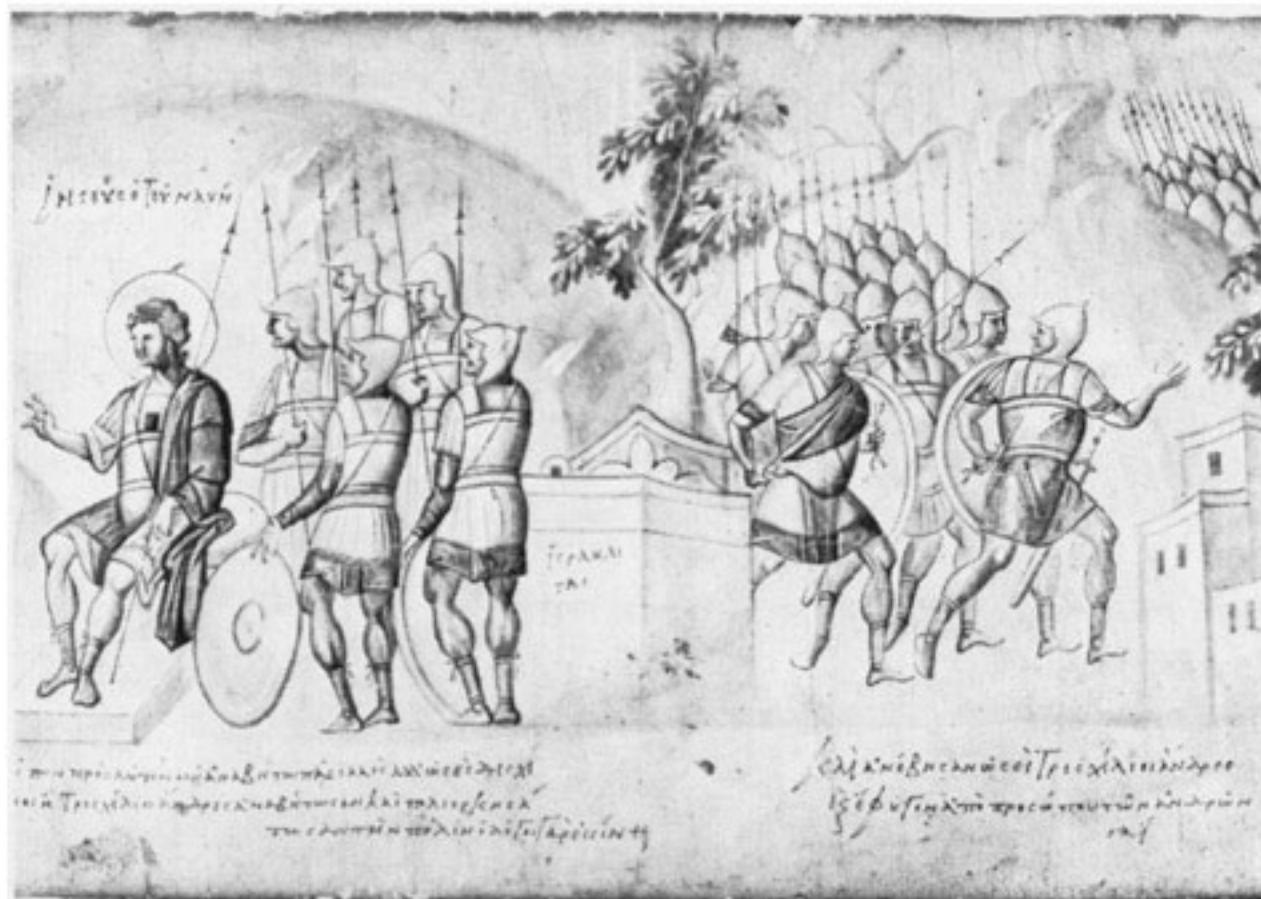


The Battle of Durazzo, 1081. Alexius planned to attack the Norman camp from three directions, but Robert Guiscard advanced to meet the main Byzantine army on the plain, destroying the bridge behind him to prevent flight; though he was not aware of it this also frustrated Alexius' encircling movement. The Norman right flank gave way when it came up against the Varangian Guard, but these in turn were defeated by the Norman infantry when they had advanced too far from their main body to receive support. Many Varangians took refuge in the church of St Michael, to which the Normans set fire. The Byzantine centre gave way after a hard fight and broke in rout.



These details from a 10th-century ivory casket depict Armenian infantry in Byzantine employ. Most of the Empire's military aristocracy were of Armenian ancestry and in the 9th and 10th centuries Armenians formed about twenty-five per cent of the Empire's armed forces or possibly even more.

The actual reformed army nucleus of the immediate post-Manzikert era at first seems to have included the remnants of the old Tagmata, the Scholae, Excubiti, Ikanatoi and Hetaeria all being recorded on occasion in the closing decades of the 11th century, but these seem to have faded away to nothing before the end of Alexius I's long reign (1118). Nikephoros III seems to have made the first concerted attempt to reorganize the central army, establishing both the Phrygian Chomatenoi regiment and, whilst Logothete of Michael VII, the Immortals. The latter appear to have been raised from amongst the remnants of the Eastern Themes and according to Bryennius were 10,000 in number; he adds that the title of 'Immortals' was at first applied only to the unit's officer's but was soon used of the whole regiment. Alexius I himself raised another regiment, the Archontopouloi or 'Sons of leaders', recruited from amongst officers' orphans and numbering about 2,000 men. All three were cavalry units, and in addition there were 'the



Another fine study of skutatoi equipment from the Joshua Roll, showing corselets with pteruges, breast-bands and shoulder-pieces. The neck-guards of their helmets appear to be flexible so are probably leather. Uniforms in this source are chiefly red, sometimes blue. (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome)

soldiers of the Emperor's household', the Vestiaritae, probably comprising both cavalry and infantry. Collectively it was these units, together with the Anglo-Scandinavian Varangian Guard (probably included in the Vestiaritae) and two new Turkish units, the élite Vardariots (Christianized Turks from the Vardar valley and Ochrida, probably Uzes) and the Turkopouloi or 'Sons of Turks' (probably comprising the offspring of Turkish mercenaries in Byzantine employ, some of them Christianized or of Byzantine mothers), which actually provided the central army for the remainder of Alexius' reign.

Several of these units fought against Robert Guiscard's Normans at the Battle of Durazzo (Dyrrachium) in 1081, the very year of Alexius' accession to the throne. It is clear, however, that his army on this occasion was a pot-pourri of mercenaries and allies, with no more than a sprinkling of native Byzantine troops; and although the Varangians at first gave Guiscard's Italian allies a hard time it was almost inevitable that when it came to the crunch the whole polyglot collection failed to hold together. The Varangians, exhausted by the rapidity of their advance and losing touch with the main body, were annihilated by Robert's infantry, the Vardariots fled, and the Byzantines' Serb allies withdrew without striking a single blow. It was a disaster from which Alexius himself only narrowly escaped.

The army that Alexius resurrected from this

débâcle could only be paid for by levying cash from his family and friends and by expropriating church possessions. This was really the nadir of Byzantine fortunes, and though Alexius achieved several notable victories in the latter part of his reign (such as over the Patzinaks at Levunium in 1091, and over the Seljuks at Philomelion in 1116) the military revival that took place under his auspices was of brief duration only. Though the army held its own under his successors John II and Manuel I, succumbing to considerable Frankish influence during the reign of the latter, it never really recovered from the disaster of Manzikert, a defeat which destroyed forever the Empire's credibility as a world super-power and dramatically marked the end of Byzantine military supremacy.

The Plates

A1 Skutatos, 11th–12th centuries

Though the old skuta remained in limited use until the end of the 11th century, by the 1080s at the very latest the majority of heavy infantrymen instead carried the kite-shield (though unarmoured foot-soldiers such as B3 are frequently depicted with circular shields of 24–30in diameter as late as the 13th century). This was probably as much a result of Norman influence as anything else, though changing tactics were undoubtedly a contributory factor, the day of the well-drilled, close-order infantryman being at an end.

A2 Skutatos, c. 950

This is the way that skutatoi appear in most pictorial sources of the 10th century. The lamellar klibanion is characteristic, usually only hip-length and often sleeveless. It was most often put on like a jacket and buckled down the front or back, though some may have been put on like a poncho and buckled down the sides. His helmet is of spangenhelm construction, with reinforcing bands running from edge to crown. The iron ring on top would take a crest like those of A3 and A4; though specified in the manuals, such crests are only rarely to be seen in contemporary illustrations.

Byzantine uniforms are usually coloured red or blue in surviving sources, though shades of green,

mauve and occasionally purple also appear. Units were identified by their shield patterns or, at least in the case of cavalry units, by the particular distinctive shade of their lance-pennons, main shield colour, crests and standards.

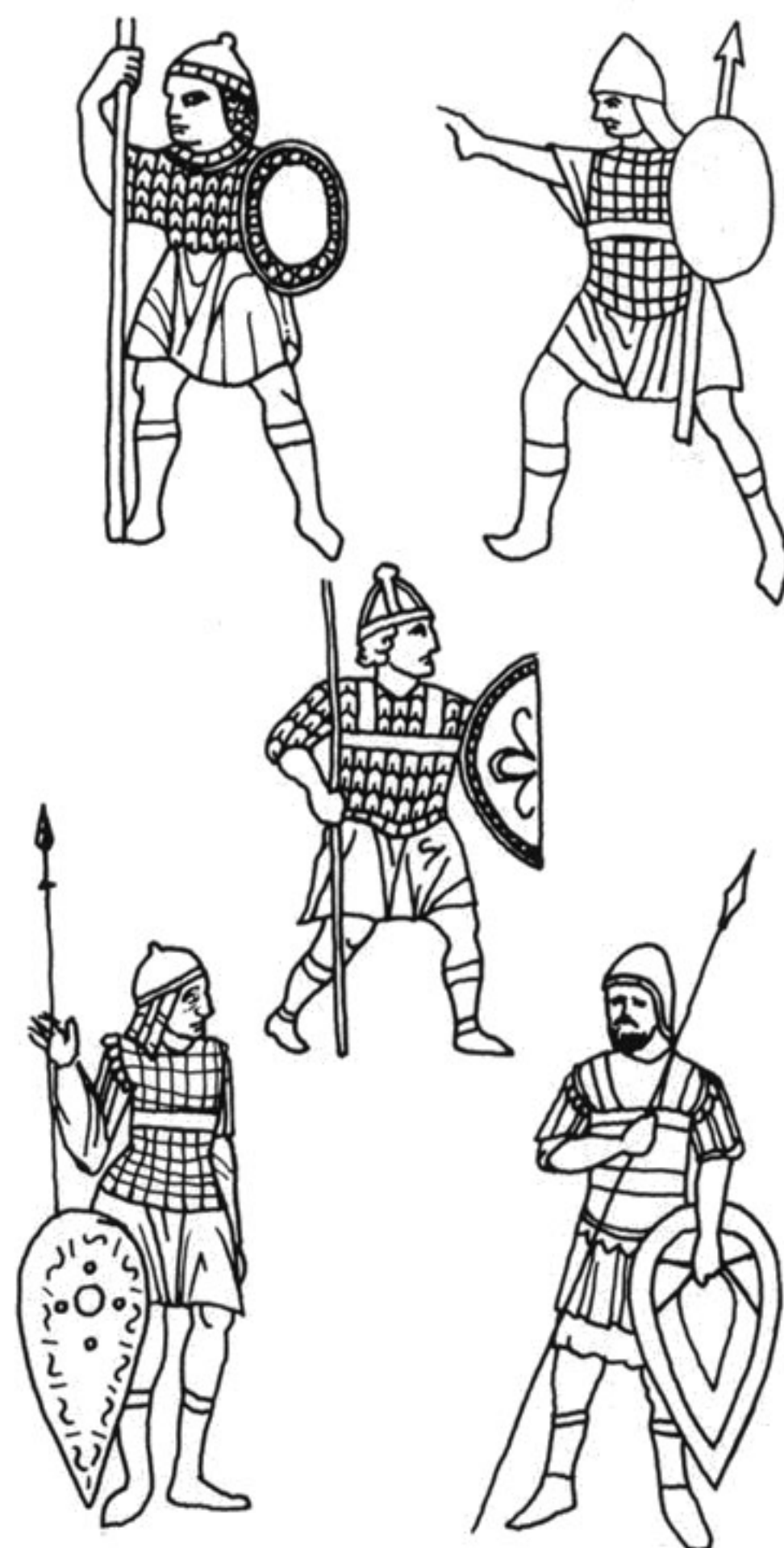
Though he is clean-shaven, neatly-trimmed beard and moustache were more common by the late 10th century.

A3 Peltastos, c. 975

Peltastoi first appear in the *Sylloge Tacticorum*, written in the second half of the 10th century, and we later encounter them, under the years 1081 and



These figures representing psiloi are taken from an assortment of 10th-century ivory caskets. The first thing we see is that, despite the military manuals' statements to the contrary, helmets appear to have been in widespread use amongst light infantry. Bows and swords are the arms most commonly depicted on the caskets, but note that of the top two figures one has a slightly curved weapon and the other a sabre-hilted sword, both probably one-edged parameria.



A similar selection of skutatoi, the top three from 10th-century caskets and the other two from later manuscripts. The 10th-century figures all wear basically the same equipment, i.e. a hip-length klibanion with or without sleeves and a helmet with or without aventail. Shields are all rather small for skutai and appear to be circular. The last figure comes from the Madrid Scylitzes, his armour really differing little from that of the 10th century. The shield of the last figure, who dates from c. 1110, is the indigenous Byzantine 'three-cornered', or kite, shield; he appears to wear a padded corselet of some kind.

1084, in Anna Comnena's *Alexiad*. They were less heavily equipped than the skutatoi, which would seem to mark them for a linking rôle between heavy and light infantry, like the peltasts of classical Greek armies. However, their evolution may in fact have been the result of economy measures necessitated by the Empire's steadily increasing financial difficulties, the skutatos's heavier and more expensive armour having become less widely available; certainly the *Sylloge* recommends that the mail or lamellar armour of heavy infantrymen should be

worn when available. It seems likely, then, that the description of such troops as peltasts reflected on their equipment rather than on their military function. The thickly-quilted bambakion is worn, plus an open-fronted helmet with neither hood nor aventail. The *Sylloge* states that they carried the circular thureos rather than the oval skuta. Arms comprised kontarion, javelins and, instead of a sword, the sabre-hilted, one-edged paramerion. The end of the scabbard illustrated was square-cut.

A4 Skutatos, according to 10th century military manuals
The arms and armour listed in the various military manuals of this era probably represent the ideal rather than the norm that a soldier could expect to encounter during active service. Quite probably it was based on the equipment of the guard regiments that were based in Constantinople.

Body armour of skutatoi consisted of mail corselet or horn or iron klibanion, though Leo VI's *Tactica* states that such armour was often only worn by the first two ranks (skutatoi generally forming up eight or sixteen ranks deep), those without substituting a bambakion. This was a padded and quilted corselet with hood and eighteen-inch sleeves, its name deriving from the Arabic word *pambuck*, meaning cotton, from which it was largely manufactured. Leo also mentions that some skutatoi might in addition wear epilorkia, a similar type of corselet, over their mail or lamellar armour. The leather harness of breaststrap and shoulder-pieces shown here is not mentioned in the manuals at all but appears in the vast majority of pictorial sources, worn mainly by foot-soldiers but also frequently by horsemen.

Additional armour comprised greaves, vambraces and leather gauntlets. Leo stated that only the front and rear ranks were to have greaves, while the much earlier *Strategikon* records greaves being worn by just the front two ranks. However, manuals of the later 10th century seem to imply that greaves had become standard skutatoi equipment, as too had a mail coif.

The skutatos's main weapon was the twelve- to fourteen-foot kontarion, made of light wood with a socketed blade at least eighteen inches long. In battle it was thrust at cavalrymen and hurled at infantrymen. A few carried heavy javelins called menaulia in place of the long spear; these were

made of non-splintering wood such as cornel or oak. Other arms comprised sword or paramerion and tzikourion.

The large three by four-foot oval skuta can be seen clearly here. This was slightly curved but not convex and had a brightly-painted face.

B1 Servant, 10th–11th centuries

Each guardsman, Tagmatic cavalryman or first-class thematic cavalryman, three or four second-class thematic cavalrymen and sixteen infantrymen had a slave or paid groom or servant to look after the baggage and perform menial chores. Servants of the Tagmatic guardsmen were provided by the Optimaton Theme, and the fact that this Theme could muster 4,000 men lends support to the argument that, c. 850–900, the Tagmata regiments comprised 4,000 men *in toto*.

The infantrymen's servant drove a light mule-drawn cart which contained, among other items, a hand-mill, saw, two spades, mallet, wicker basket, scythe, bill-hook and two pick-axes. Since the servants were responsible for entrenching the army's camp each night the purpose of these tools is fairly obvious. If there was a shortage of servants the worst soldiers (probably defaulters) had to carry out their chores. Known collectively as the *tuldum*, servants carried a sling for self-defence and are sometimes to be found on the extreme flanks of a Byzantine battle-array.

B2 Pack-mules, 10th century

Pack-mules of the Tagmata were provided from Imperial ranches and stud-farms administered by an official called the Logothete of the Herds, as were many of those used by the Imperial household, the latter also receiving contributions of mules from state and church officers. All those of the Imperial household wore red housings. The Imperial baggage alone required hundreds of mules and horses for its transport, including 100 for cooking utensils and silver table-ware and thirty for chandeliers, tapestries, silver bowls and cooking cauldrons. Other items accompanying the Emperor on campaign included a library, a complete pharmacy and wardrobe, Turkish leather baths, and a private chapel complete with portable altar and ikons!



B3 Unarmoured infantryman, 11th–12th centuries

Infantrymen of this type occur with increasing regularity in sources of the 11th–13th centuries as the rôle of the foot-soldier in Byzantine tactics steadily declined. This particular figure is based on illuminations in the Scylitzes manuscript in Madrid. Despite the absence of armour he is not really a

Details worthy of notice in this 10th-century David and Goliath illumination from the Paris Psalter are, in the upper scene, Goliath's crested helmet with aventail of leather strips and his javelin with butt-spike, and in the lower scene David's one-edged paramerion. Note also the spiked helmets at left and right. The shields are fairly certainly convex here, and armour appears to be leather. (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)

'light' infantryman in the true sense of the word, since the sources tend to show such soldiers fighting in fairly tight formations; more probably he should be classified as a 'light-medium' infantryman, successor to the peltastos described under A3. However, psiloi of the type described below also survived into the 12th century, being both illustrated in the Scylitzes manuscript and recorded in the *Alexiad*. The spear he carries is a rhiptarion or akoution, a light throwing weapon.

B4 Psilos, according to 10th century military manuals

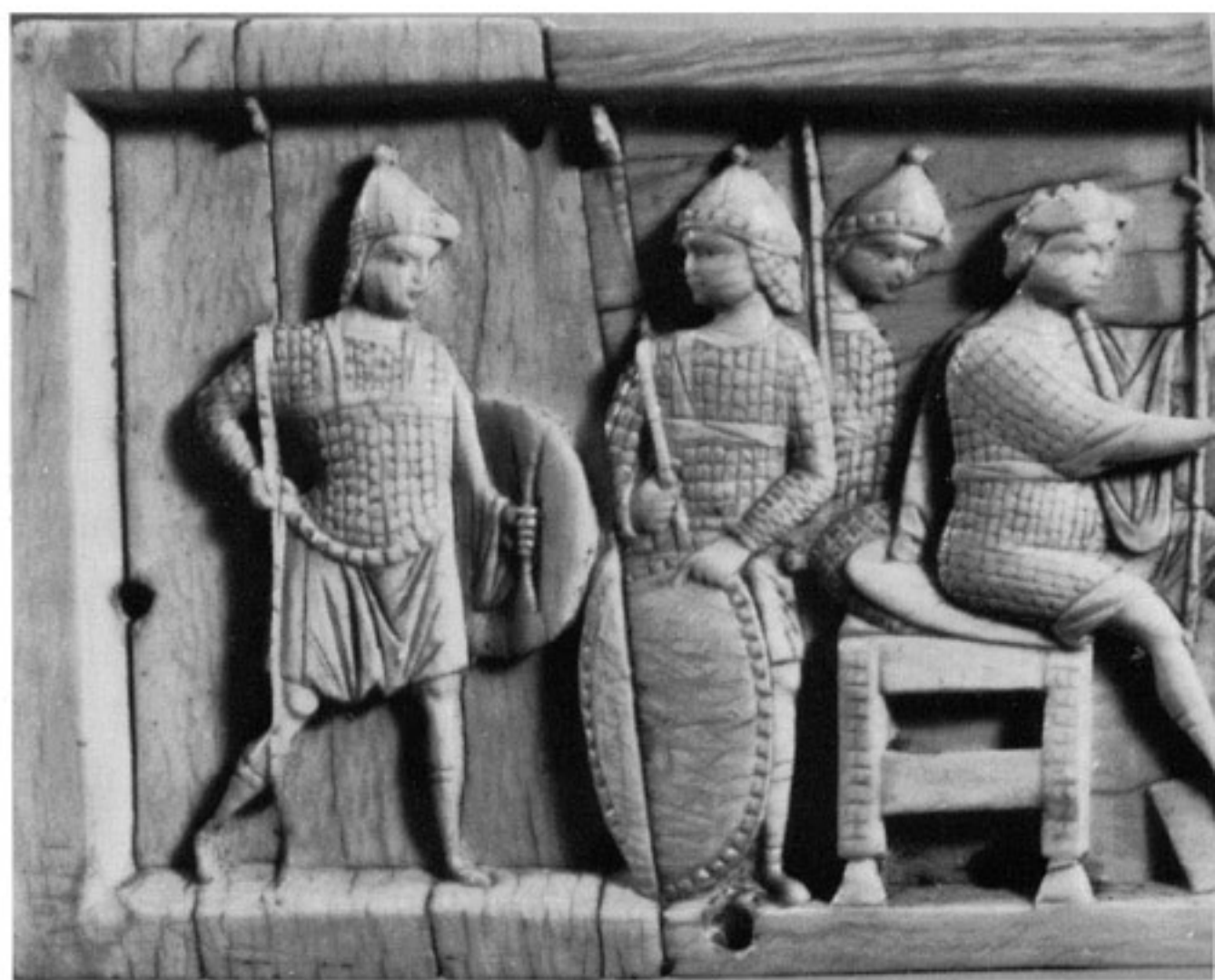
The principal weapon of the psilos or light infantryman was the composite bow drawn to the chest, though some substituted javelins, staff-sling or crossbow, and archers were often issued in addition with a sling as a reserve missile weapon. The bowcase/quiver, slung from a strap across the left shoulder, carried forty arrows. In Leo's day the psilos's only defensive weapon was a light hand-axe, the tzikourion. Armour was not usually worn, though the manuals say that light mail or lamellar corselets should be supplied to as many archers as possible if available, at the same time admitting the difficulty of getting them for more than a few—men equipped thus were probably to be found only in heavy infantry units. A small shield of twelve inches diameter was probably also carried, though Leo forbids it and the earlier *Strategicon* says it was often discarded in action as 'too heavy'! Nikephoros II, however, records that his archers are to have a small shield, as well as two quivers (one of sixty arrows and one of forty), two bows, four bow-strings, sling, sword and tzikourion.

Though oft-reproduced, this ivory casket from the Victoria and Albert Museum still remains one of the best representations of 10th-century skutatoi. All wear lamellar corselets, that of the seated general at left reaching to knee as well as elbow, and carry kontaria so long that they disappear out of the top of the panel. Though badly cut the leather harness of breast-bands and shoulder-pieces is also apparent. Two large oval shields of the type called skutai are apparent, while the man at extreme left carries instead a circular thureos. The two figures at the opposite end of the panel are apparently wearing non-metallic armour, either leather or possibly quilted fabric, and are perhaps peltastoi. All have helmets with scale aventails, surmounted by a ring to which a crest would be attached on parade. (Victoria and Albert Museum, London)

C1 Kataphractus, according to 10th century military manuals

Though inevitably the descriptions contained in the various military handbooks differ in detail, the equipment they list is similar enough to arrive at this composite figure. Body-armour comprised a mail corselet or, if unavailable, a klibanion of iron, horn or leather lamellae. Both the *Tactica* and the *Sylloge* mention that a klibanion could in fact be worn over the mail corselet, and it is clear from the pictorial sources that this was indeed fairly common practice. At the shoulders smaller versions of the helmet crest were worn. Additional armour consisted of vambraces and greaves (here, of wooden strips), leather gauntlets and—when available—a mail hood attached to the brim of the helmet. Leo mentions that a padded wool or linen gorget could be worn if the mail hood was unavailable, but he is quoting the earlier *Strategicon* practically verbatim at this point. Padded armour could also be worn under or over the corselet.

Kataphractoi of the 10th century carried as their main weapon either lance or bow. The lance was the slender, twelve-foot kontos (meaning 'barge-pole'!), more commonly referred to as a kontarion by this time, with its ten-inch head and coloured pennon (Leo says that the pennon was removed in battle). It would seem that two lances were issued per lancer in Leo's time, the spare probably being carried in the baggage train. Those equipped with a bow instead carried the quiver suspended at the right hip and the waterproof bowcase, complete with a pouch containing a spare bowstring,



suspended at the left. The quiver contained thirty to forty 27in arrows. Bad archers substituted two javelins for the bow, and during the second half of the century two javelins and a spear could also be substituted for the lance. Other arms comprised sword and dagger. Officers at least had a mace too, carried in a leather case attached to the saddle.

The kite-shield carried here is the indigenous Byzantine type. Small circular targets twelve inches in diameter are specified in Leo's *Tactica*, but larger circular shields of twenty-four to thirty inches diameter and, later, kite-shields are far more common in pictorial sources. Archers officially carried no shield at all, but it seems likely that regulations were often ignored and most bow-armed kataphractoï probably carried the small twelve-inch target, strapped to the left forearm.

C2 Cavalry standard-bearer, 11th–12th centuries

This is the type of cavalry equipment most commonly depicted in contemporary sources from the mid-11th century onwards, comprising kite-shield, helmet with leather or scale aventail and a hip-length corselet with pteruges at the shoulders and, less often, the waist. The sources seem most commonly to depict the corselet as scale armour, though the artistic convention followed could equally well portray mail, or possibly on occasion even lamellar. Note that the kite-shield is now of the more characteristic 'Norman' type.

The horse accoutrements are also fairly standard; though one or two of the manuals mention plumes suspended from throat-lash, breast and

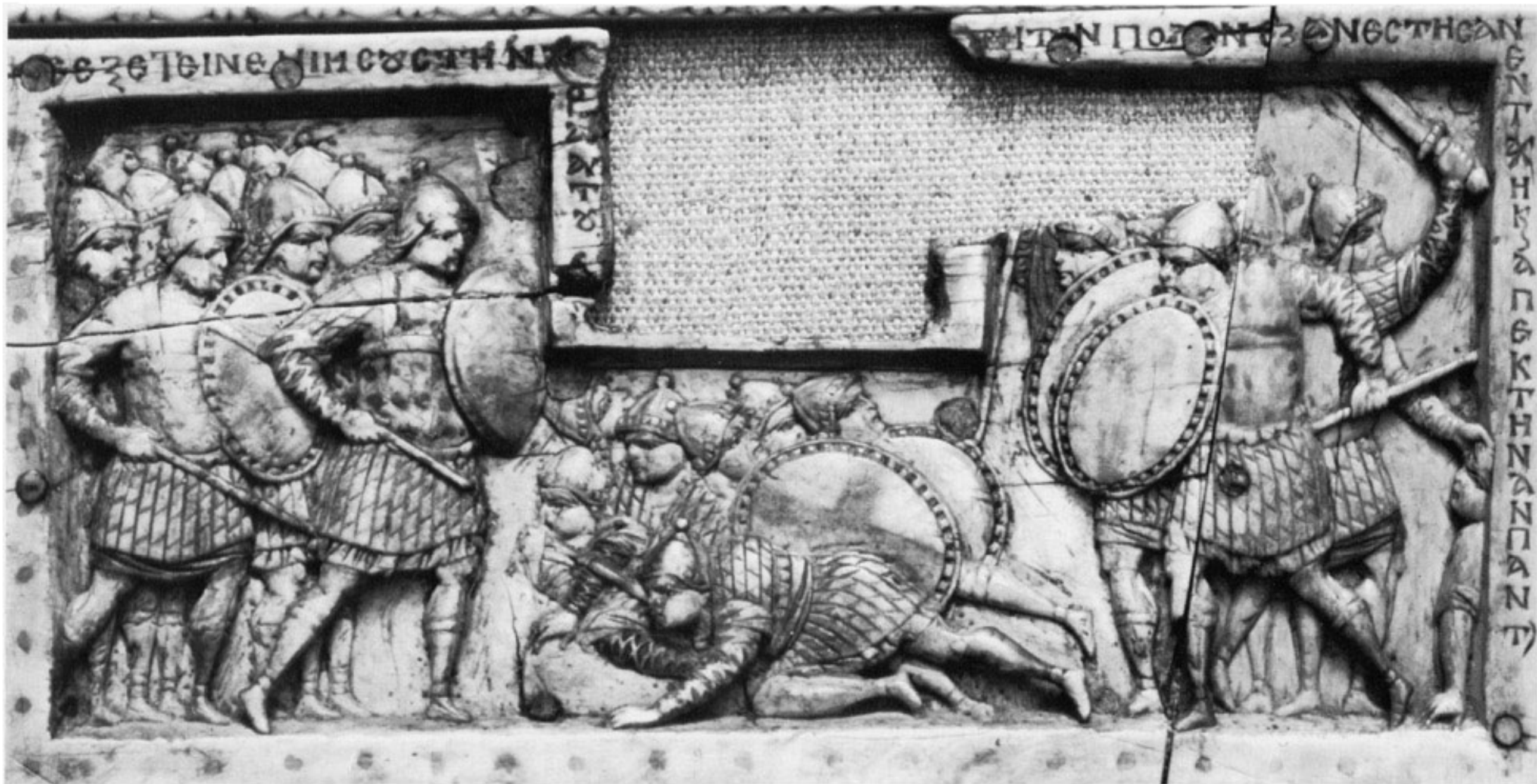
rump straps, these appear only rarely in illustrative sources. Harness was most commonly dyed red or black, otherwise being left as undyed yellowish leather. Saddle-cloths were often some shade of red. Note, incidentally, the absence of spurs on the rider's boots, these apparently not being adopted by the Byzantines until quite late.

The standard carried here is from the Scylitzes manuscript and is probably the type called a bandon, used by both infantry and cavalry units by Leo VI's time. The size and shape of the bandon appears to have varied according to the size of the unit, those of dhoungoi and turmai apparently being similar to but longer than those of banda. Those in Scylitzes have between three and eight tails, the number of tails possibly indicating the size of the unit. The cross appears to have been the most common standard device, often embroidered in gold and silver.

C3 Kataphractos, c. 1050

Most cavalymen seem to have had cloaks. Leo's *Tactica* describes a waterproof, sandy-brown coloured type which appears to have been army-issue, but those to be found in contemporary enamels and manuscripts are fairly certainly non-regulation and quite probably of civilian origin, being brightly coloured with richly embroidered hems and panels. The panel on the front of the cloak, the characteristic shape of which can be seen here, was called a *tablion*. The cloak was not normally worn in action, instead being rolled up and strapped behind the saddle.





Detail from another 10th-century ivory panel depicting skutatoi, their large oval shields again much in evidence. The equipment portrayed differs from that of the last picture mainly in the addition of pteruges to the corselets. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of J. Piermont Morgan 1917)

D Klibanophoros, c. 970

The klibanophoroi were a revival by Nikephoros II of the true cataphract, which had not been seen since late Roman times. The *Nikephori Praecepta Militaria* describes the armour of these super-heavy cavalry as a lamellar klibanion with elbow-length sleeves, and over it a thick, padded epilorikion. The head was protected by an iron helmet with a mail hood two or three layers thick which left only the eyes uncovered, the forearms and lower legs being protected by splint-armour vambraces and greaves, with any gaps filled by pieces of mail. In addition mail-strengthened gauntlets appear to have been worn, while feet were probably protected by a metal overshoe. Their stout horses were likewise heavily armoured, wearing klibania of ox-hide, split at the front for ease of movement and leaving only the eyes, nostrils and lower legs unprotected. Other forms of horse-armour mentioned in the sources include two or three layers of felt glued together; horn or iron lamellae; and mail. An iron chanfron might also be worn.

They drew up in a wedge formation on the battlefield, with twenty men in the first rank, twenty-four in the second, and four more in each consecutive rank; the last rank (the twelfth) could

comprise as many as sixty-four men, which means there were 504 in the whole unit. Apparently a unit of 384 was more common (i.e. only ten ranks). The front four ranks in either case carried marzobarboula in addition to the usual sword and kontarion, and some men, lighter-equipped than the lancers, were armed instead with bows; if there were 300 lancers there could be eighty archers, and if there were 500 lancers there could be as many as 150 archers.

Because of their cost klibanophoroi were probably limited to the Tagmata regiments, and it seems likely that Manzikert saw the end of them.

E1 Guard officer, c. 880

Almost identical figures appear in Byzantine sources as early as the 4th century. This man, in dress uniform, is probably a member of the Hetaeria or one of the Tagmata regiments, and the red cloak and circular embroidered panels on the skirt of his tunic seem to indicate that he is an officer.

E2 Emperor in parade armour, c. 1017

Though armour such as this, complete with crown, is frequently depicted in contemporary sources being worn by Emperors in battle this is undoubtedly artistic licence, and there is little doubt that in reality it was reserved for state occasions. Probably equipment more like that of C1 was worn

on campaign. However, more functional versions of the gold armbands, sometimes of scale but more often of iron, appear in many sources from the 11th century onwards, often engraved to look like pteruges.

E3 Member of the Basilikoi Anthropoi, c. 880

The Basilikoi Anthropoi (the 'men of the Basileus' or Emperor) were court attendants of a military or semi-military nature, comprising *spatharokandidatoi*, *spatharioi* (called *spatharioi basilikoi* to distinguish them from those comprising the retinues of strategoi), *stratores*, *kandidatoi* and *mandatores*, collectively under the command of an official called the *protospatharios* by this period. We know from Constantine Porphyrogenitus that they bore the Imperial arms on parade, and it is clear from their names that both *spatharioi* and *spatharokandidatoi* were, originally at least, sword-bearers. This particular figure, however, is probably a *kandidatus*, who wore white uniforms and were

David and Goliath scene from the Menologium of Basil II, c. 1017. 'Goliath' is a good example of an 11th-century heavy infantryman, wearing the usual lamellar corselet with fringe and pteruges plus the sash of an officer. His helmet, and those of the leather-armoured 'Israelites' crowded behind the hill, is of a new brimmed variety, reminiscent of a kettle-helmet, which seems to first start appearing at about this date. The figure of David, in lower-class costume and armed only with a sling, can probably be taken as representative of the appearance of soldiers' servants on the battlefield (see Plate B1). (Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice)



distinguished by their gold torques or neck-chains (characteristic of most Byzantine guardsmen from late-Roman times until at least the 11th century); perhaps it was such sword-bearing *kandidatoi* who were called *spatharokandidatoi*. On state occasions they could be mounted, and wore gilded armour and helmets and had white cloaks and standards. The *kandidatoi* were probably the oldest element of the Basilikoi Anthropoi, its members originally being selected, on the basis of their size and strength, from the ranks of the *Scholae*. The *kandidatoi* and *spatharioi* at least had their own halls in the Imperial Palace.

F1 Rus mercenary, c. 950

Many of those Scandinavians who settled in Russia were soon influenced by the dress of their Slav and Asiatic neighbours. This man, for instance, wears the bleached white linen tunic characteristic of the Slavs, and his striped, baggy trousers are probably of Asiatic origin; another Asiatic trait adopted by some Rus was the tattooing of the hands and arms up to the shoulder. Boots and a cloak clasped at the shoulder completed their costume. Most wore mail coats, and arms comprised spear, axe, sword and

Though dating to the 13th century this is the same type of helmet as is worn by Goliath in the Menologium picture. This particular one is very ornate, engraved with saints and arabesque patterns, and was clearly that of an officer.



dagger. This man's helmet is of Slav design, as is his shield, illustrated in the accompanying monochrome sketch. Rectangular shields of this type persisted in Russia for many centuries.

In appearance the Rus were 'tall as date palms' with red or blond hair and ruddy complexions. Most were bearded, though some affected only drooping Turkish-style moustaches. Prince Svyatoslav of Kiev even shaved his head Turkish-fashion, leaving just two long locks of hair to signify his rank.

F2 Varangian Guardsman, c. 1000

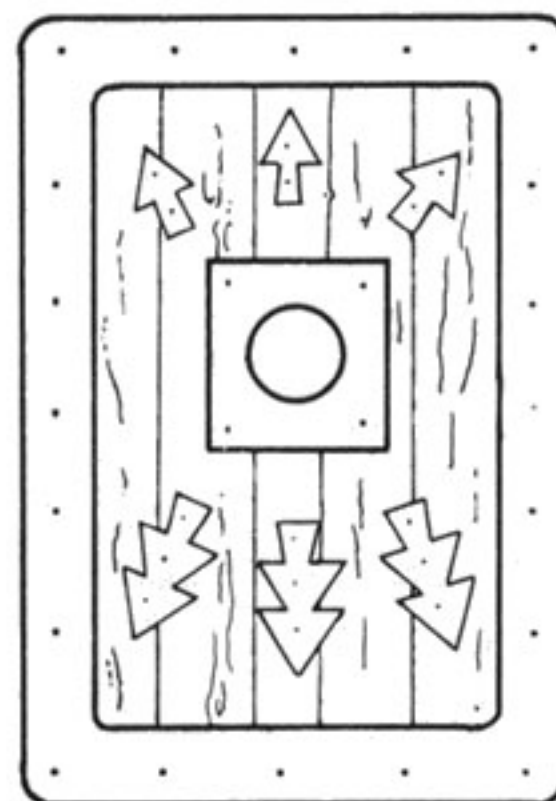
The most distinctive feature of the Varangian's equipment was undeniably his axe, which appears to have been retained in preference to the *rhomphaia* more usually carried by Byzantine guardsmen. Psellus, however, claims that every Varangian 'without exception' was armed with shield and *rhomphaia*, 'a one-edged sword of heavy iron which they carry suspended from the right shoulder' (perhaps meaning it was sloped across the right shoulder when not in use).

Though the two-handed axe was their main weapon spears and swords are also mentioned in the sources. It is clear from the sagas that many men kept their own swords when they entered the Guard, and since their axes too were fairly certainly brought from home we have leave to doubt just how much of their equipment (as opposed to uniforms) was actually official Byzantine issue. Most probably a mixture of Scandinavian and Byzantine gear was in use, the latter probably becoming predominant the longer a man stayed in the Guard as his own equipment wore out.

We know from Anna Comnena that Varangians were generally heavily armoured, and this man has taken full advantage of access to the Imperial arsenals to supplement his own equipment with vambraces and greaves. Their shields probably remained circular throughout the 11th century, but in 1122 we hear of Varangians with kite-shields.

F3 Varangian Guardsman in dress uniform, c. 1030

Laxdaela Saga records several ex-Varangian Guards wearing scarlet clothes when they returned to Iceland in about 1030 or 1040. The equipment of Bolli Bollasson, their leader, is described in some



detail as comprising silk clothes (presented by the Emperor himself), a scarlet cloak, a gilded helmet, and a scarlet shield decorated with a warrior outlined in gold, probably all Byzantine issue. In addition, his sword had a gold-decorated hilt and grip, which is of interest since we know that the right to wear a gold-hilted sword was one of the privileges that accompanied the court rank of *manglabites*, which was later to be held by Harald Hardraada as an officer of the Guard; Bolli, therefore, may likewise have held this rank.

G1 Trapezitos, according to 10th century military manuals

Native light cavalry, called *trapezitae*, are described by both Leo VI and the author of the *Sylloge Tacticorum*. They were unarmoured (though some might wear a hood of horn scales) and armed with sword, kontarion and two or three javelins, the latter apparently not to exceed nine feet in length. It is also possible that some were equipped as horse-archers. The shield they carried appears to have been the large infantry *skuta* or *thureos*, the circular *thureos* apparently remaining popular amongst light cavalry until the 13th century. The *Sylloge* also mentions a light cavalry shield of twenty-seven inches diameter, and the small twelve-inch target seems to have been used too.

G2 Patzinak mercenaries, 11th century

The Patzinaks, or Pechenegs, were a Turkish people often to be found in Byzantine employ from the late 9th century onwards, comprising one of the largest mercenary elements of the army by the middle to late 11th century. Many detachments were employed as a sort of provincial police by that



time, in which rôle we find them dogging the unruly march of the First Crusade through the Empire's European provinces.

Like all Asiatic peoples their main weapon was the composite bow, but javelins, spear, sabre and hand-axe were also carried, as well as a lasso used to entangle enemy horses and riders in close combat. For defence a small circular shield of osiers, wood or hide was carried. Body armour of lamellar construction could also be worn depending on the social status of the wearer; chieftains and their retinues, for instance, were normally armoured.

H1 Seljuk mercenary, late 11th century

Surprisingly, Seljuk Turks did not appear in Byzantine service until *after* their victory over Romanus IV at Manzikert, when between 1071 and 1081 successive Emperors and generals, desperate for troops, rather shortsightedly introduced large numbers of them into Anatolia, most of which they soon overran. They were first-class soldiers of a rather fierce and savage disposition—'ferocious beasts covered in blood' is the way one Armenian described them. At this time the Byzantines employed them exclusively as light cavalry horse-archers.

This man, a chieftain, wears the characteristic wide-skirted topcoat which had a flap called a *muqallab* passing diagonally across the chest from right to left; this was tied by tapes under the arm and down the left side. From the belt, which is made of silver plaques, hang his bowcase, quiver

'Greek Fire', or Sea Fire (*pyr thalassion*) as the Byzantines themselves called it, had been invented in Constantinople c. 673. Throughout its history, however, it appears to have been used entirely in naval and siege warfare. It was fired from siphons by heating or by a jet of water (opinions differ) and was extremely difficult to extinguish. One of the advances made during this era was the invention of 'hand syringes' (*mikroi siphones*) in Leo VI's reign, these being fired from behind iron shields. The picture here, from the Madrid Scylitzes, shows the more conventional shipboard use, with the Fire being fired from copper, bronze or iron-covered tubes. (Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid)

and sword-scabbard. On horseback he would also carry javelins, lasso and probably one or two spare bows and quivers. The mace was also a popular weapon. Armour was mainly of lamellar construction, but here a captured mail corselet is being worn under the topcoat. Most Seljuks, however, were unarmoured and would have carried for protection only the small shield. This, like their clothes, appears to have been brightly coloured.

H2, H3 Italo-Norman mercenaries, late 11th century

From 1038 onwards, under such leaders as Hervé Frankopoulos, Robert Crispin and Roussel de Bailleul, bands of Norman adventurers had flocked to take service with the Emperor, though it soon became apparent that their main ambition was to carve out their own little Normandy in the heart of Anatolia.

It seems almost superfluous to describe their arms and equipment here, but the *Alexiad* contains a good description which deserves to be quoted: 'Keltic armour,' Anna says, 'consists of a tunic of interwoven iron rings linked one with another; the iron is of good quality, and being arrowproof

protects the wearer's body. This armour is supplemented by a shield, not circular but long, broad at the top and tapering to a point. Inside it is slightly curved; the outside is smooth and shiny with a flashing, bronze boss. That shield could repel any arrow, whether Skythian or Persian or even fired by the arms of a giant, and make it rebound against the firer.' She also says of Norman armour that it 'made them almost, if not completely invulnerable'. The armour of H₃, based on a chesspiece from Norman Italy, is less characteristic and betrays considerable Byzantine influence.

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